

WOMEN, POLITICS AND MURDER

Screenplay By

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Based on the story by Dashiell Hammett

FADE IN.

EXT. GILMORE HOUSE -- NOON

INSERT: A doorbell. A finger enters frame and pushes it. We hear a "Ding-Dong".

Back to scene.

NICK STARK, 30's, is standing outside the door of a rather large house. He is smoking a cigarette. A PLUMP MAID with bold eyes and a loose, full-lipped mouth answers the door.

STARK

I'm Detective Nick Stark from the  
Continental Detective Agency.

The plump maid doesn't say anything. She opens the door and lets him in. Stark tosses his cigarette and enters.

INT. GILMORE HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS.

The maid leads Stark up two flights of steps and into an elaborately furnished boudoir, where a woman in black sits at a window. She is MRS. GILMORE.

Mrs. Gilmore is a thin woman of a little more than thirty, and her face is white and haggard. She is a fast talker. She is smoking a cigarette complete with a cigarette holder.

Stark is standing in the doorway of the room. He takes a step in when...

MRS. GILMORE

You are from the Continental  
Detective Agency?

STARK

Yes.

MRS. GILMORE

I want you to find my husband's  
murderer. The police have done  
nothing. Four days, and they have  
done nothing. They say it was a  
robber, but they haven't found him.  
They haven't found anything!

STARK

But, Mrs. Gilmore, you must--

MRS. GILMORE

(interjecting)

I know! I know! But they have done nothing, I tell you--nothing. I don't believe they've made the slightest effort. I don't believe they want to find h--

(she almost says "her")

him.

STARK

Him? You think it was a man?

Mrs. Gilmore bites her lip and looked away from Stark, out the window.

MRS. GILMORE

I don't know, it might have--

(her face spin toward Stark)

I'll tell you. You can judge for yourself. Bernard wasn't faithful to me. There was a woman who calls herself Cara Kenbrook. She wasn't the first. But I learned about her last month. We quarreled. Bernard promised to give her up. Maybe he didn't. But if he did, I wouldn't put it past her -- a woman like that would do anything -- anything. And down in my heart I really believe she did it!

STARK

And you think the police don't want to arrest her?

MRS. GILMORE

I didn't mean exactly that. I'm all unstrung, and likely to say anything. Bernard was mixed up in politics, you know; and if the police found, or thought, that politics had anything to do with his death, they might -- I don't know just what I mean. I'm a nervous, broken woman, and full of crazy notions.

(stretching her thin hand out)

Straighten this tangle out for me!  
Find the person who killed Bernard!

Stark nods with empty assurance.

STARK

Do you know this Kenbrook woman?

MRS. GILMORE

I've seen her on the street, and that's enough to know what sort of person she is!

STARK

Did you tell the police about her?

MRS. GILMORE

No...

(she looks back out the window then adding defensively...)

The police detectives who came to see me acted as if they thought I might have killed Bernard. I was afraid to tell them that I had cause for jealousy. Maybe I shouldn't have kept quiet about that woman, but I didn't think she had done it until afterward, when the police failed to find the murderer. Then I began to think she had done it; but I couldn't make myself go to the police and tell them that I had withheld information. I knew what they'd think. So I -- You can twist it around so it'll look as if I hadn't known about the woman, can't you?

STARK

Possibly. Now as I understand it, your husband was shot on Pine Street, between Leavenworth and Jones, at about three o'clock Tuesday morning. That right?

MRS. GILMORE

Yes.

STARK

Where was he going?

MRS. GILMORE

Coming home, I suppose; but I don't know where he had been. Nobody knows. The police haven't found out, if they have tried. He told me Monday evening that he had a business engagement. He was a

(MORE)

MRS. GILMORE (cont'd)  
building contractor, you know. He  
went out at about half-past eleven,  
saying he would probably be gone  
four or five hours.

STARK

Wasn't that an unusual hour to be  
keeping a business engagement?

MRS. GILMORE

Not for Bernard. He often had men  
come to the house at midnight.

STARK

Can you make any guess at all where  
he was going that night?

MRS. GILMORE

(shaking her head with  
emphasis)

No. I knew nothing at all about his  
business affairs, and even the men  
in his office don't seem to know  
where he went that night.

STARK

That isn't unlikely. Most of the B.  
F. Gilmore Construction Company's  
work has been on city and state  
contracts, and it isn't altogether  
unheard-of for secret conferences  
to go with that kind of work. Your  
politician-contractor doesn't  
always move in the open. How about  
enemies?

MRS. GILMORE

I don't know anybody that hated him  
enough to kill him.

STARK

Where does this Kenbrook woman  
live, do you know?

MRS. GILMORE

Yes -- in the Garford Apartments on  
Bush Street.

STARK

Nothing you've forgotten to tell  
me, is there?

MRS. GILMORE  
No, I've told you everything I know  
-- every single thing.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET -- LATER.

Stark is walking down the street smoking a cigarette.

STARK (V.O.)  
Walking over to California Street,  
I shook down my memory for what I  
had heard here and there of Bernard  
Gilmore. I could remember a few  
things -- the opposition papers had  
been in the habit of exposing him  
every election year -- but none of  
them got me anywhere. I had known  
him by sight: a boisterous,  
red-faced man who had hammered his  
way up from hod-carrier to the  
ownership of a half-million-dollar  
business and a pretty place in  
politics. 'A roughneck with a  
manicure,' somebody had called him;  
a man with a lot of enemies and  
more friends; a big, good-natured,  
hard-hitting rowdy.

CUT TO:

INT. TROLLEY CAR -- LATER.

Stark is sitting on the outside seat of the trolley car.

STARK (V.O.)  
Odds and ends of a dozen graft  
scandals in which he had been mixed  
up, without anybody ever really  
getting anything on him, flitted  
through my mind. There had been  
some talk of a bootlegging  
syndicate of which he was supposed  
to be the head...

CUT TO:

EXT. HALL OF JUSTICE -- LATER.

STARK (V.O.)

I left the car at Kearny Street and  
walked over to the Hall of Justice.

Stark walks into the Hall of Justice.

CUT TO:

INT. HALL OF JUSTICE -- CONTINUOUS

Stark is walking through the Hall of Justice. He passes a sign that reads "Detectives Assembly". He ends up in front of Detective O'GAR, a squat man of 50.

STARK (V.O.)

In the detectives' assembly-room I found O'Gar, the detective-sergeant in charge of the Homicide Detail. He went in for wide-brimmed hats of the movie-sheriff sort, but his little blue eyes and bullet-head weren't handicapped by the trick headgear.

STARK

I want some dope on the Gilmore killing.

O'GAR

(walking away, Stark follows)  
So do I. But if you'll come along I'll tell you what little I know while I'm eating. I ain't had lunch yet.

CUT TO:

INT. SUTTER STREET LUNCHROOM -- MINUTES LATER.

Stark and O'Gar are sitting at a table by themselves. O'Gar leans over his clam chowder and tells Stark what he knows about the murder. Stark is smoking a cigarette.

O'GAR

One of the boys, Kelly, was walking his beat early Tuesday morning, coming down the Jones Street hill from California Street to Pine. It was about three o'clock -- no fog

(MORE)

O'GAR (cont'd)  
or nothing -- a clear night.  
Kelly's within maybe twenty feet of  
Pine Street when he hears a shot.  
He whisks around the corner, and  
there's a man dying on the north  
sidewalk of Pine Street, halfway  
between Jones and Leavenworth.  
Nobody else is in sight. Kelly runs  
up to the man and finds it's  
Gilmore. Gilmore dies before he can  
say a word. The doctors say he was  
knocked down and then shot; because  
there's a bruise on his forehead,  
and the bullet slanted upward in  
his chest. See what I mean? He was  
lying on his back when the bullet  
hit him, with his feet pointing  
toward the gun it came from. It was  
a thirty-eight.

STARK  
Any money on him?

O'GAR  
(after talking a spoonful of  
chowder.)  
Six hundred smacks, a coupla  
diamonds, and a watch. Nothing  
touched.

STARK  
What was he doing on Pine Street at  
that time in the morning?

O'GAR  
Damned if I know, brother. Chances  
are he was going home, but we can't  
find out where he'd been. Don't  
even know what direction he was  
walking in when he was knocked  
over. He was lying across the  
sidewalk with his feet to the curb;  
but that don't mean nothing -- he  
could of turned around three or  
four times after he was hit.

STARK  
All apartment buildings in that  
block, aren't there?

O'GAR

Uh-huh. There's an alley or two running off from the south side; but Kelly says he could see the mouths of both alleys when the shot was fired -- before he turned the corner -- and nobody got away through them.

STARK

Reckon somebody who lives in that block did the shooting?

O'Gar tilts his bowl, scoops up the last drops of the chowder, put them in his mouth, and grunts.

O'GAR

Maybe. But we got nothing to show that Gilmore knew anybody in that block.

STARK

Many people gather around afterward?

O'GAR

A few. There's always people on the street to come running if anything happens. But Kelly says there wasn't anybody that looked wrong -- just the ordinary night crowd. The boys gave the neighborhood a combing, but didn't turn up anything.

STARK

Any cars around?

O'GAR

Kelly says there wasn't, that he didn't see any, and couldn't of missed seeing it if there'd been one.

STARK

What do you think?

O'Gar stands up and glares at Stark.

O'GAR

(disagreeably)

I don't think. I'm a police detective.

Stark takes a drag from his cigarette.

STARK (V.O.)

I knew by that that somebody had  
been panning him for not finding  
the murderer.

O'GAR

I need to go. I got to be in court  
this afternoon.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARFORD APARTMENTS -- LATER.

Stark presses the button tagged "Miss Cara Kenbrook" several  
times before the door clicks open. He enters.

INT. GARFORD APARTMENTS -- CONTINUOUS.

Stark walks up a flight of stairs and down a hall to her  
door. CARA KENBROOK stands presently at the open door. She  
is a tall girl of 23 or 24. She is in a black and white  
crepe dress.

STARK

Miss Cara Kenbrook?

KENBROOK

Yes.

Stark hands her a card.

STARK

I'm Detective Stark. I'd like to  
ask you a few questions; may I come  
in?

KENBROOK

Do.

She steps aside languidly for Stark to enter. He does. She  
closes the door behind him.

INT. KENBROOK APT. -- CONTINUOUS.

Kenbrook's apartment is littered with newspapers, cigarettes  
in all stages of consumption from unlighted freshness to  
cold ash, and miscellaneous articles of feminine clothing.

She leads Stark into the living room. She makes room for Stark on a chair by dumping off a pair of silk stockings and a hat. She sits on some magazines that occupied another chair.

STARK

I'm interested in Bernard Gilmore's death.

KENBROOK

(without interest)  
Bernard Gilmore. Oh, yes.

STARK

(puzzled by her bleakness)  
You and he were pretty close friends, weren't you?

KENBROOK

We had been -- yes.

STARK

What do you mean by had been?

She pushes back a lock of her short-cut brown hair with a lazy hand.

KENBROOK

I gave him the air last week.

STARK

When was the last time you saw him?

KENBROOK

Last week--Monday, I think -- a week before he was killed.

STARK

Was that the time when you broke off with him?

KENBROOK

Yes.

STARK

Have a row, or part friends?

KENBROOK

Not exactly either. I just told him that I was through with him.

STARK  
How did he take it?

KENBROOK  
It didn't break his heart. I guess  
he'd heard the same thing before.

STARK  
Where were you the night he was  
killed?

KENBROOK  
At the Coffee Cup, eating and  
dancing with friends until about  
one o'clock. Then I came home and  
went to bed.

STARK  
Why did you split with Gilmore?

KENBROOK  
Couldn't stand his wife.

STARK  
Huh?

KENBROOK  
She was a nuisance. She came here  
one night and raised a racket; so I  
told Bernie that if he couldn't  
keep her away from me he'd have to  
find another playmate.

STARK  
Have you any idea who might have  
killed him?

KENBROOK  
Not unless it was his wife -- these  
excitable women always do silly  
things.

STARK  
If you had given her husband up,  
what reason would she have for  
killing him, do you think?

KENBROOK  
I'm sure I don't know. But I'm not  
the only girl that Bernie ever  
looked at.

STARK

Think there were others, do you?  
Know anything, or are you just  
guessing?

KENBROOK

I don't know any names, but I'm not  
just guessing.

STARK

What happened the night his wife  
came here?

KENBROOK

Nothing but that. She followed  
Bernie here, rang the bell, rushed  
past me when I opened the door, and  
began to cry and call Bernie names.  
Then she started on me, and I told  
him that if he didn't take her away  
I'd hurt her, so he took her home.

Stark stands up.

STARK (V.O.)

Admitting I was licked for the  
time, I got up and moved to the  
door. I couldn't do anything with  
this baby just now. I didn't think  
she was telling the whole truth,  
but on the other hand it wasn't  
reasonable to believe that anybody  
would lie so woodenly -- with so  
little effort to be plausible.

She leads Stark to the door and opens it for him.

STARK

I may be back later

KENBROOK

All right.

Stark steps out.

INT. GARFORD APARTMENTS -- CONTINUOUS.

Stark is walking away from Kenbrook.

STARK (V.O.)

She didn't have a beautiful face,  
although it she should have one.

(MORE)

STARK (V.O.) (cont'd)  
Everything was there -- perfect features; smooth, white skin; big, almost enormous eyes -- but the eyes were dead-dull, and the face was as empty of expression as a china doorknob, and what I said didn't change it.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET -- LATER.

Stark is walking to the crime scene.

STARK (V.O.)  
From that unsatisfactory interview I went to the scene of the killing, only a few blocks away, to get a look at the neighborhood. I found the block just as I had remembered it and as O'Gar had described it: lined on both sides by apartment buildings, with two blind alleys -- one of which was dignified with a name, Touchard Street -- running from the south side.

Stark examines the streets.

STARK (V.O.)  
The murder was four days old; I didn't waste any time snooping around the vicinity; but, after strolling the length of the block, boarded a Hyde Street car, transferred at California Street.

CUT TO:

EXT. GILMORE HOUSE -- LATER

Stark is getting out of a trolley car.

STARK (V.O.)  
I wanted to see Mrs. Gilmore again. I was curious to know why she hadn't told me about her call on Cara Kenbrook.

Stark walks to the door of the Gilmore house, and rings the doorbell. The same plump maid who had admitted him earlier in the afternoon opened the door.

PLUMP MAID

Mrs. Gilmore is not at home. I think she'll be back in half an hour or so.

STARK

I'll wait.

INT. GILMORE HOUSE LIBRARY -- CONTINUOUS.

The maid takes Stark into the library, an immense room on the second floor, with barely enough books in it to give it that name. She switches on a light (the windows are too heavily curtained to let in much daylight) crossed to the door, stopped, moved over to straighten some books on a shelf, and looks at Stark (who is sitting in a chair) with a half-questioning, half-inviting look in her eyes, starts for the door again, and halts. She looks back at Stark. He smiles at her. She walks over to Stark, with an exaggerated swing of the hips, and stands close in front of him.

STARK

What's on your mind?

PLUMP MAID

Suppose -- suppose a person knew something that nobody else knew; what would it be worth to them?

STARK

That... would depend on how valuable it was.

PLUMP MAID

Suppose I knew who killed the boss?  
(she bends down and whispers  
in a husky voice)  
What would that be worth?

STARK

The newspapers say that one of Gilmore's clubs has offered a thousand-dollar reward. You'd get that.

Her eyes go greedy, and then suspicious.

PLUMP MAID

If you didn't.

STARK (V.O.)

(shrugging)

I knew she'd go through with it -- whatever it was -- now; so I didn't even explain to her that the Continental doesn't touch rewards, and doesn't let its hired men touch them.

STARK

I'll give you my word, but you'll have to use your own judgment about trusting me.

She licks her lips.

PLUMP MAID

You're a good fellow, I guess. I wouldn't tell the police, because I know they'd beat me out of the money. But you look like I can trust you.

(She leers into Stark's face)

I used to have a gentleman friend who was the very image of you, and he was the grandest--

STARK

(interjecting)

Better speak your piece before somebody comes in.

She shoots a look at the door, clears her throat, licks her loose mouth again, and drops on one knee beside Stark's chair.

PLUMP MAID

I was coming home late Monday night -- the night the boss was killed -- and was standing in the shadows saying good night to my friend, when the boss came out of the house and walked down the street. And he had hardly got to the corner, when she -- Mrs. Gilmore -- came out, and went down the street after him. Not trying to catch up with him, you understand; but following him. What do you think of that?

STARK

What do you think of it?

PLUMP MAID

I think that she finally woke up to the fact that all of her Bernie's dates didn't have anything to do with the building business.

STARK

Do you know that they didn't?

PLUMP MAID

Do I know it? I knew that man! He liked 'em -- liked 'em all.  
(she smiles an evil smile)  
I found that out soon after I first came here.

STARK

Do you know when Mrs. Gilmore came back that night -- what time?

PLUMP MAID

Yes, at half-passed three.

STARK

Sure?

PLUMP MAID

Absolutely! After I got undressed I got a blanket and sat at the head of the front stairs. My room's in the rear of the top floor. I wanted to see if they came home together, and if there was a fight. After she came in alone I went back to my room, and it was just twenty-five minutes to four then. I looked at my alarm clock.

STARK

Did you see her when she came in?

PLUMP MAID

Just the top of her head and shoulders when she turned toward her room at the landing.

STARK

What's your name?

## PLUMP MAID

Lina Best.

## STARK

All right, Lina, If this is the goods I'll see that you collect on it. Keep your eyes open, and if anything else turns up you can get in touch with me at the Continental office. Now you'd better beat it, so nobody will know we've had our heads together.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GILMORE HOUSE LIBRARY -- LATER.

Stark is sitting alone in the library.

## STARK (V.O.)

Alone in the library, I cocked an eye at the ceiling and considered the information Lina Best had given me. But I soon gave that up -- no use trying to guess at things that will work out for themselves in a while. I found a book, and spent the next half-hour reading about a sweet young she--chump and a big strong he--chump and all their troubles.

A door opens off screen

## STARK (V.O.)

Then Mrs. Gilmore came in, apparently straight from the street.

Stark stands up and Mrs. Gilmore closes the door behind her.

## STARK

Mrs. Gilmore, why didn't you tell me that you followed your husband the night he was killed?

## MRS. GILMORE

That's a lie!

## STARK

Don't you think you're making a mistake? Don't you think you'd better tell me the whole thing?

She opens her mouth, but only a dry sobbing sound come out; and she begins to sway with a hysterical rocking motion, the fingers of one black-gloved hand plucks at her lower lip, twisting and pulling it.

Stark leads her to the chair he was sitting in. Gradually she pulls herself together; her eyes have lost their glassiness, and she stops clawing at her mouth.

MRS. GILMORE

(in a hoarse whisper)

I did follow him.

(She gets off the chair and kneels with arms held up to Stark. Her voice is a thin scream)

But I didn't kill him! I didn't!  
Please believe that I didn't!

Stark picks her up and puts her back in the chair.

STARK

I didn't say you did. Just tell me what happened.

MRS. GILMORE

I didn't believe him when he said he had a business engagement. I didn't trust him. He had lied to me before. I followed him to see if he went to that woman's room.

STARK

Did he?

MRS. GILMORE

No. He went into an apartment house on Pine Street, in the block where he was killed. I don't know exactly which house it was -- I was too far behind him to make sure. But I saw him go up the steps and into one -- near the middle of the block.

STARK

And then what did you do?

MRS. GILMORE

I waited, hiding in a dark doorway across the street. I knew the woman's apartment was on Bush Street, but I thought she might have moved, or be meeting him here.

(MORE)

MRS. GILMORE (cont'd)

I waited a long time, shivering and trembling. It was chilly and I was frightened -- afraid somebody would come into the vestibule where I was. But I made myself stay. I wanted to see if he came out alone, or if that woman came out. I had a right to do it -- he had deceived me before. It was terrible, horrible -- crouching there in the dark--cold and scared. Then -- it must have been about half-past two -- I couldn't stand it any longer. I decided to telephone the woman's apartment' and find out if she was home. I went down to an all-night lunchroom on Ellis Street and called her up.

STARK

Was she home?

MRS. GILMORE

No! I tried for fifteen minutes, or maybe longer, but nobody answered the phone. So I knew she was in that Pine Street building.

STARK

And what did you do then?

MRS. GILMORE

I went back there, determined to wait until he came out. I walked up Jones Street. When I was between Bush and Pine I heard a shot. I thought it was a noise made by an automobile then, but now I know that it was the shot that killed Bernie. When I reached the corner of Pine and Jones, I could see a policeman bending over Bernie on the sidewalk, and I saw people gathering around. I didn't know then that it was Bernie lying on the sidewalk. In the dark and at that distance I couldn't even see whether it was a man or a woman. I was afraid that Bernard would come out to see what was going on, or look out of a window, and discover me; so I didn't go down that way. I

(MORE)

MRS. GILMORE (cont'd)  
was afraid to stay in the neighborhood now, for fear the police would ask me what I was doing loitering in the street at three in the morning -- and have it come out that I had been following my husband. So I kept on walking up Jones Street, to California, and then straight home.

STARK  
And then what?

MRS. GILMORE  
Then I went to bed. I didn't go to sleep -- lay there worrying over Bernie; but still not thinking it was he I had seen lying in the street. At nine o'clock that morning two police detectives came and told me Bernie had been killed. They questioned me so sharply that I was afraid to tell them the whole truth. If they had known I had reason for being jealous, and had followed my husband that night, they would have accused me of shooting him. And what could I have done? Everybody would have thought me guilty. So I didn't say anything about the woman. I thought they'd find the murderer, and then everything would be all right. I didn't think she had done it then, or I would have told you the whole thing the first time you were here. But four days went by without the police finding the murderer, and I began to think they suspected me! It was terrible! I couldn't go to them and confess that I had lied to them, and I was sure that the woman had killed him and that the police had failed to suspect her because I hadn't told them about her. So I employed you. But I was afraid to tell even you the whole truth. I thought that if I just told you there had been another woman and who she was, you could do the rest without having to know that I had followed Bernie that night. I was

(MORE)

MRS. GILMORE (cont'd)  
 afraid you would think I had killed  
 him, and would turn me over to the  
 police if I told you everything.  
 And now you do believe it! And  
 you'll have me arrested! And  
 they'll hang me! I know it! I know  
 it!

She begins to rock crazily in the chair. Stark shushes her.

STARK  
 You're not arrested yet. Sh-h-h.

STARK (V.O.)  
 I didn't know what to make of her  
 story. The trouble with these  
 nervous, hysterical women is that  
 you can't possibly tell when  
 they're lying and when telling the  
 truth unless you have outside  
 evidence -- half of the time they  
 themselves don't know.

She quiets down.

STARK  
 When you heard the shot, you were  
 walking north on Jones, between  
 Bush and Pine? You could see the  
 corner of Pine and Jones?

MRS. GILMORE  
 Yes -- clearly.

STARK  
 See anybody?

MRS. GILMORE  
 No -- not until I reached the  
 corner and looked down Pine Street.  
 Then I saw a policeman bending over  
 Bernie, and two men walking toward  
 them.

STARK  
 Where were the two men?

MRS. GILMORE  
 On Pine Street east of Jones. They  
 didn't have hats on -- as if they  
 had come out of a house when they  
 heard the shot.

STARK  
Any automobiles in sight either  
before or after you heard the shot?

MRS. GILMORE  
I didn't see or hear any.

STARK  
I have some more questions, Mrs.  
Gilmore, but I'm in a hurry now.  
Please don't go out until you hear  
from me again.

MRS. GILMORE  
I won't, but-

Stark sticks his hand out to stop her.

STARK (V.O.)  
I didn't have any answers for any  
body's questions, so I ducked my  
head and left the library.

INT. GILMORE HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS.

Near the street door Lina Best appears out of a shadow, her  
eyes bright and inquisitive.

STARK  
Stick around.

Stark steps around her, and goes on out into the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARFORD APARTMENTS -- LATER

Stark is walking to the apartment building.

STARK (V.O.)  
I went back to the Garford  
Apartments, walking, because I had  
a lot of things to arrange in my  
mind before I faced Cara Kenbrook  
again. And, even though I walked  
slowly, they weren't all exactly  
filed in alphabetical order when I  
got there.

He pushes the doorbell.

CUT TO:

INT. GARFORD APARTMENTS -- CONTINUOUS.

Cara Kenbrook waits at her door. She's changed the black and white dress for a plush like gown of bright green, but her empty doll's face hasn't changed. Stark walks up to her.

STARK

I have some more questions.

She admits him without word or gesture, and leads him back into the room where we had talked before.

INT. KENBROOK APT. -- CONTINUOUS.

Stark stands beside the chair.

STARK

Miss Kenbrook, why did you tell me you were home in bed when Gilmore was killed?

KENBROOK

Because it's so.

STARK

And you wouldn't answer the doorbell?

STARK (V.O.)

I had to twist the facts to make my point. Mrs. Gilmore had phoned, but I couldn't afford to give this girl a chance to shunt the blame for her failure to answer off on central.

She hesitates.

KENBROOK

No -- because I didn't hear it.

STARK (V.O.)

One cool article, this baby. I couldn't figure her. I didn't know then, and I don't know now, whether she was the owner of the world's best poker face or was just naturally stupid. But whichever she was, she was thoroughly and completely it.

STARK

And you wouldn't answer the phone either?

KENBROOK

It didn't ring -- or not enough to awaken me.

Stark chuckles an artificial chuckle.

STARK (V.O.)

Central could have been ringing the wrong number. However... I decided to lie.

STARK

Miss Kenbrook, your phone rang at two-thirty and at two-forty that morning. And your doorbell rang almost continually from about two-fifty until after three.

KENBROOK

Perhaps, but I wonder who'd be trying to get me at that hour.

STARK

You didn't hear either?

KENBROOK

No.

STARK

But you were here?

KENBROOK

(carelessly)

Yes -- who was it?

STARK

Get your hat, and I'll show them to you down at headquarters.

She glances down at the green gown and walks toward an open bedroom door.

KENBROOK

I suppose I'd better get a cloak, too.

STARK

Yes, and bring your toothbrush.

She turns around then and looks at Stark, and for a moment it seems that some sort of expression -- surprise, maybe -- was about to come into her big eyes; but none actually came. The eyes stayed dull and empty.

KENBROOK

You mean you're arresting me?

STARK

Not exactly. But if you stick to your story about being home in bed at three o'clock last Tuesday morning, I can promise you you will be arrested. If I were you I'd think up another story.

She leaves the doorway slowly and comes back into the room, as far as a chair that stands between them, puts her hands on its back, and leans over it to look at Stark. For perhaps a minute neither speaks -- just standing there staring at each other. Both expressionless.

KENBROOK

Do you really think that I wasn't here when Bernie was killed?

STARK

(with fake certainty)

I'm a busy man, Miss Kenbrook. If you want to stick to your funny story, it's all right with me. But please don't expect me to stand here and argue about it. Get your hat and cloak.

She shrugs, and walks around the chair on which she had been leaning.

KENBROOK

(sitting down)

I suppose you do know something. Well, it's tough on Stan, but women and children first.

STARK (V.O.)

(puzzled)

Stan?

KENBROOK

I was in the Coffee Cup until one o'clock. I did come home afterward. I'd been drinking vino all evening, and it always makes me blue. So

(MORE)

## KENBROOK (cont'd)

after I came home I got to worrying over things. Since Bernie and I split, finances haven't been so good. I took stock that night -- or morning -- and found only four dollars in my purse. The rent was due, and the world looked damned blue. Half-lit on dago wine as I was, I decided to run over and see Stan, tell him all my troubles, and make a touch. Stan is a good egg and he's always willing to go the limit for me. Sober, I wouldn't have gone to see him at three in the morning; but it seemed a perfectly sensible thing to do at the time. It's only a few minutes' walk from here to Stan's. I went down Bush Street to Leavenworth, and up Leavenworth to Pine. I was in the middle of that last block when Bernie was shot -- I heard it. And when I turned the corner into Pine Street I saw a copper bending over a man on the pavement right in front of Stan's. I hesitated for a couple of minutes, standing in the shadow of a pole, until three or four men had gathered around the man on the sidewalk. Then I went over. It was Bernie. And just as I got there I heard the copper tell one of the men that he had been shot. It was an awful shock to me. You know how things like that will hit you!

(Stark nods)

Dumbfounded, not knowing what to do, I didn't even stop. I went on, passing as close to Bernie as I am to you now, and rang Stan's bell. He let me in. He had been half-undressed when I rang. His rooms are in the rear of the building, and he hadn't heard the shot, he said. He didn't know Bernie had been killed until I told him. It sort of knocked the wind out of him. He said Bernie had been there -- in Stan's rooms -- since midnight, and had just left. Stan asked me what I was doing there,

(MORE)

KENBROOK (cont'd)

and I told him my tale of woe. That was the first time Stan knew that Bernie and I were so thick. I met Bernie through Stan, but Stan didn't know we had got so chummy. Stan was worried for fear it would come out that Bernie had been to see him that night, because it would make a lot of trouble for him -- some sort of shady deal they had on, I guess. So he didn't go out to see Bernie. That's about all there is to it. I got some money from Stan, and stayed in his rooms until the police had cleared out of the neighborhood; because neither of us wanted to get mixed up in anything. Then I came home. That's straight -- on the level.

STARK

(demanding)

Why didn't you get this off your chest before?

KENBROOK

I was afraid. Suppose I told about Bernie throwing me down, and said I was close to him -- a block or so away -- when he was killed, and was half-full of vino? The first thing everybody would have said was that I had shot him! I'd lie about it still if I thought you'd believe me.

STARK

So Bernie was the one who broke off, and not you?

KENBROOK

(lightly)

Oh, yes.

Starks lights a cigarette and starts smoking it. Cara watches him.

STARK (V.O.)

I had two women -- neither normal. Mrs. Gilmore was hysterical, abnormally nervous. This girl was dull, subnormal. One was the dead

(MORE)

STARK (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 man's wife; the other his mistress;  
 and each with reason for believing  
 she had been thrown down for the  
 other. Liars, both; and both  
 finally confessing that they had  
 been near the scene of the crime at  
 the time of the crime, though  
 neither admitted seeing the other.  
 Both, by their own accounts, had  
 been at that time even further from  
 normal than usual -- Mrs. Gilmore  
 filled with jealousy; Cara  
 Kenbrook, half-drunk. What was the  
 answer? Either could have killed  
 Gilmore; but hardly both -- unless  
 they had formed some sort of crazy  
 partnership, and in that event --  
 (a look of realization comes  
 over him)

Suddenly all the facts I had  
 gathered -- true and false --  
 clicked together in my head. I had  
 the answer -- the one simple,  
 satisfying answer!

STARK  
 (grinning)  
 Who is Stan?

KENBROOK  
 Stanley Tennant -- he has something  
 to do with the city.

STARK (V.O.)  
 Stanley Tennant. I knew him by  
 reputation, a --

A key rattled in the hall door.

The hall door opens and closes, and a MAN'S footsteps came toward the open doorway of the room in which we were. A tall, broad-shouldered man in tweeds filled the doorway -- a ruddy-faced man of 35 or so, whose appearance of athletic blond wholesomeness is marred by close-set eyes of an indistinct blue. Seeing Stark, he stops -- a step inside the room.

KENBROOK  
 (lightly)  
 Hello, Stan. This gentleman is from  
 the Continental Detective Agency.  
 I've just emptied myself to him  
 (MORE)

KENBROOK (cont'd)  
 about Bernie. Tried to stall him at  
 first, but it was no good.

Stan's vague eyes switch back and forth between the girl and Stark. He straightens his shoulders and smiles too jovially.

STAN  
 And what conclusion have you come  
 to?

KENBROOK  
 I've already had my invitation to  
 take a ride.

Stan bends forward. With an unbroken swing of his arms, he sweeps a chair up from the floor into Stark's face. Not much force behind it, but quick. Stark falls back against the wall, fending off the chair with both arms -- throws it aside -- and looks into the muzzle of a nickeled revolver.

STAN  
 Now, turn around.

Stark turns around. Stan fells around Stark's body and takes Stark's gun away.

STAN  
 Alright.

Stark faces Stan. He steps back to the girl's side, still holding the nickel-plated revolver at Stark. Stark's gun isn't in sight -- in his pocket perhaps. Stan is breathing noisily. Veins are popping on his forehead.

STAN  
 You know me?

STARK  
 Yes, I know you. You're Stanley  
 Tennant, assistant city engineer,  
 and your record is none too lovely.

STARK (V.O.)  
 I chattered away on the theory that  
 conversation is always somehow to  
 the advantage of the man who is  
 looking into the gun.

STARK  
 You're supposed to be the lad who  
 supplied the regiment of  
 well-trained witnesses who turned

(MORE)

STARK (cont'd)

last year's investigation of graft charges against the engineer's office into a comedy. Yes, Mr. Tennant, I know you. You're the answer to why Gilmore was so lucky in landing city contracts with bids only a few dollars beneath his competitors. Yes, Mr. Tennant, I know you. You're the bright boy who--

STAN

(interjecting)

That will do out of you! Unless you want me to knock a corner off your head with this gun.

(to Cara)

Get up, Cara.

She gets out of her chair and stands beside him. His gun is in his right hand, and that side is toward her. He moves around to the other side.

The fingers of his left hand hook themselves inside the girl's green gown where it was cut low over the swell of her breasts. His gun never wavers from Stark. Stan jerks his left hand, ripping her gown down to the waistline.

STAN

He did that, Cara.

Cara nods.

His fingers slide inside the undergarment that was now exposed, and he tore that as he had torn the gown.

STAN

He did that.

Cara nods again.

His bloodshot eyes dart little measuring glances at her face -- swift glances that never kept his eyes from Stark for the flash of time Stark would have needed to tie into him.

Then -- eyes and gun on Stark -- he smashed his left fist into Cara's blank white face.

One whimper -- low and not drawn out -- comes from her as she goes down in a huddle against the wall. There isn't much change in her face. She looks dumbly up at Tennant from where she has fallen.

STAN

He did that.

She nods, gets up from the floor, and returns to her chair.

STAN

(staring at Stark)

Here's our story. Gilmore was never in my rooms in his life, Cara, and neither were you. The night he was killed you were home shortly after one o'clock, and stayed here. You were sick -- probably from the wine you had been drinking -- and called a doctor. His name is Howard. I'll see that he's fixed. He got here at two-thirty and stayed until three-thirty. Today, this gumshoe, learning that you had been intimate with Gilmore, came here to question you. He knew you hadn't killed Gilmore, but he made certain suggestions to you -- you can play them up as strong as you like; maybe say that he's been annoying you for months -- and when you turned him down he threatened to frame you. You refused to have anything to do with him, and he grabbed you, tearing your clothes, and bruising your face when you resisted. I happened to come along then, having an engagement with you, and heard you scream. Your front door was unlocked, so I rushed in, pulled this fellow away, and disarmed him. Then we held him until the police -- whom we will phone for -- came. Got that?

KENBROOK

Yes, Stan.

STAN

Good! Now listen: When the police get here this fellow will spill all he knows of course, and the chances are that all three of us will be taken in. That's why I want you to know what's what right now. I ought to have enough pull to get you and me out on bail tonight, or, if worse comes to worst, to see that

(MORE)

STAN (cont'd)

my lawyer gets to me tonight -- so I can arrange for the witnesses we'll need. Also I ought to be able to fix it so our little fat friend will be held for a day or two, and not allowed to see anybody until late tomorrow -- which will give us a good start on him. I don't know how much he knows, but between your story and the stories of a couple of other smart little ladies I have in mind, I'll fix him up with a rep that will keep any jury in the world from ever believing him about anything.

(triumphantly)

How do you like that?

STARK

(laughing)

You big clown. I think it's funny.

STARK (V.O.)

But I didn't really think so. In spite of what I thought I knew about Gilmore's murder -- in spite of my simple, satisfactory solution -- something was crawling up my back, my knees felt jerky, and my hands were wet with sweat. I had had people try to frame me before -- no detective stays in the business long without having it happen -- but I had never got used to it. There's a peculiar deadliness about the thing -- especially if you know how erratic juries can be -- that makes your flesh crawl, no matter how safe your judgment tells you you are.

STAN

(to Cara)

Phone the police, and for God's sake keep your story straight!

As he tries to impress that necessity on the girl his eyes leave Stark.

Stark suddenly jumps to the side.

The gun fires, but misses Stark.

He loops his right fist over as he jumps. It lands when he lands. It hits Stan on the cheek-bone. It rocks him back a couple of steps. Stan drops the gun.

Stark hits Stan and doesn't allow him to catch his balance. He kicks and punches him in the stomach. Every time Stan tries to stand up he is hit again. Stark drives him into the corner.

Stark grabs Stan's collar with his left hand and begins to punch him across the face with his right hand. he punches his about five or six times before he is broken up by a sudden whack to the back of his head.

Cara is standing behind him with the gun in her hand. She pistol-whips Stark for a second time. Then a third time. Stark turns to look at Cara, but Stans fist prevents that. Stan punches Stark in the ear. Stark falls to the side, still conscience.

Stan stands up and takes Stark's own gun out of his pocket and points it at Stark. Stan sits in the chair to catch his breath. Cara sits in the other chair. Stark sits leaning against the wall.

STAN

This is fine -- all the signs of a struggle we need to make our story good!

STARK

If they don't believe you were in a fight, you can strip and show them your little tummy.

STAN

And you can show them this!

Stan punches Stark in the mouth, splitting his lip.

Stark stands up after recovering.

Stan moves around behind the chair he was sitting in. Gun still pointed at Stark.

STAN

Go easy. My story will work if I have to kill you -- maybe work better. Phone the police, Cara.

Cara walks into the next room and closes the door behind her.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. KENBROOK APT. -- MINUTES LATER.

Stan is talking to two police officers. Cara is there also, nodding her head every time one of the officers looks her way. Stark is still standing where he had been.

STARK (V.O.)

Ten minutes later three uniformed policemen arrived. All three knew Tennant, and they treated him with respect. Tennant reeled off the story he and the girl had cooked up, with a few changes to take care of the shot that had been fired from the nicked gun and our rough-house. She nodded her head vigorously whenever a policeman looked at her. Tennant turned both guns over to the white-haired sergeant in charge. I didn't argue, didn't deny anything.

STARK

(speaking up)

I'm working with Detective Sergeant O'Gar on a job. I want to talk to him over the phone and then I want you to take all three of us down to the detective bureau.

STARK (V.O.)

Tennant objected to that, of course; not because he expected to gain anything, but on the off-chance that he might. The sergeant looked from one of us to the other in puzzlement. Me, with my skinned face and split lip; Tennant, with a red lump under one eye where my first wallop had landed; and the girl, with most of the clothes above the waistline ripped off and a bruised cheek.

SERGEANT

It has a queer look, this thing, and I shouldn't wonder but what the detective bureau was the place for the lot of you.

One of the police officers takes Stark into the hallway to the phone. The officer dials a number on the phone.

OFFICER

(on the phone)

Detective O'Gar? We have Nick Stark here, and he wants to talk to you.

(beat)

Alright, here he is.

The officer hands Stark the phone.

STARK

(on the phone)

O'Gar.

(beat)

Cleaning up the Gilmore murder, Meet me at the Hall. Will you get hold of Kelly, the patrolman who found Gilmore, and bring him down there? I want him to look at some people.

(beat)

Great.

Stark hangs up.

CUT TO:

INT. HALL OF JUSTICE, MCTIGHE'S OFFICE -- LATER.

Stan is giving his story to lieutenant MCTIGHE. Cara, and the two other officers are there also.

Stark is sitting down on the other side of the room.

STARK (V.O.)

The "wagon" in which the three policemen had answered Cara Kenbrook's call carried us down to the Hall of Justice, where we all went into the captain of detectives' office. McTighe, a lieutenant, was on duty. I knew McTighe, and we were on pretty good terms, but I wasn't an influence in local politics, and Tennant was. I don't mean that McTighe would have knowingly helped Tennant frame me; but with me stacked up against the assistant city engineer, I knew who would get the benefit of any doubt there might be. My head was thumping and roaring just now, with knots all over it where the girl

(MORE)

STARK (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 had beaned me. I sat down, kept quiet, and nursed my head while Tennant and Cara Kenbrook, with a lot of details that they had not wasted on the uniformed men, told their tale and showed their injuries.

O'Gar walks into the office and notices Stan. O'Gar raises an eyebrow. He walks over to Stark and sits next to him.

O'GAR  
 (muttering)  
 What the hell is all this?

STARK  
 (muttering)  
 A lovely mess. Listen -- in that nickel gun on the desk there's an empty shell. Get it for me.

O'Gar scratches his head doubtfully, listens to the next few words of Tennant's yarn, glances at Stark out of the corner of his eye, and then walks over to the desk and picks up the revolver. McTighe looks at him -- a sharp, questioning look.

O'GAR  
 (breaking the gun open)  
 Something on the Gilmore killing.

The lieutenant starts to speak, changes his mind, and O'Gar brings the shell over and handed it to Stark.

STARK  
 (putting the shell in his pocket)  
 Thanks. Now listen to my friend there. It's a good act, if you like it.

STAN  
 (continuing his story)  
 ... Naturally a man who tried a thing like that on an unprotected woman would be yellow, so it wasn't very hard to handle him after I got his gun away from him. I hit him a couple of times, and he quit -- begging me to stop, getting down on his knees. Then we called the police.

McTighe looks at Stark with eyes that are cold and hard.

STARK (V.O.)

McTighe looked at me with eyes that were cold and hard. Tennant had made a believer of him, and not only of him -- the police-sergeant and his two men were glowering at me. I suspected that even O'Gar -- with whom I had been through a dozen storms -- would have been half-convinced if the engineer hadn't added the neat touches about my kneeling.

MCTIGHE

(sternly)

Well, what have you got to say?

STARK

I've got nothing to say about this dream. I'm interested in the Gilmore murder -- not in this stuff.

(to O'Gar)

Is the patrolman here?

O'Gar walks to the door, and calls for KELLY.

O'GAR

Oh, Kelly!

Kelly comes in -- a big, straight-standing man, with iron-gray hair and an intelligent fat face.

STARK

You found Gilmore's body?

KELLY

I did.

STARK

(pointing at Cara)

Ever see her before?

KELLY

(studying Cara)

Not that I remember.

STARK

Did she come up the street while you were looking at Gilmore, and go into the house he was lying in front of?

KELLY

She did not.

STARK

(taking the shell out of his pocket and throwing it on the desk in front of Kelly)

Kelly, why did you kill Gilmore?

Kelly's right hand goes under his coat-tail at his hip.

Stark jumps at him. He is restrained by O'Gar and the other policemen. Stark goes down hard with the men all over him.

When Stark is brought to his feet, Kelly stands straight up by the desk, weighing his service revolver in his hand. He lays the weapon on the desk. Then he unfastens his shield and puts it with the gun.

KELLY

(simply)

It was an accident.

STARK (V.O.)

By this time the birds who had been manhandling me woke up to the fact that maybe they were missing part of the play -- that maybe I wasn't a maniac. Hands dropped off me, and presently everybody was listening to Kelly.

KELLY

I was walkin' my beat that night, an' as I turned the corner of Jones into Pine I saw a man jump back from the steps of a buildin' into the vestibule. A burglar, I thought, an' cat-footed it down there. It was a dark vestibule, an' deep, an' I saw somethin' that looked like a man in it, but I wasn't sure. "Come out o' there!" I called, but there was no answer. I took my gun in my hand an' started up the steps. I saw him move just then, comin' out. An' then my foot slipped. It was worn smooth, the bottom step, an' my foot slipped. I fell forward, the gun went off, an' the bullet hit him. He had come out a ways by then, an' when the bullet hit him he toppled over frontwise,

(MORE)

KELLY (cont'd)

tumblin' clown the steps onto the sidewalk. When I looked at him I saw it was Gilmore. I knew him to say 'howdy' to, an' he knew me -- which is why he must o' ducked out of sight when he saw me comin' around the corner. He didn't want me to see him comin' out of a buildin' where I knew Mr. Tennant lived, I suppose, thinkin' I'd put two an' two together, an' maybe talk. I don't say that I did the right thing by lyin', but it didn't hurt anybody. It was an accident, but he was a man with a lot of friends up in high places, an' -- accident or no -- I stood a good chance of bein' broke, an' maybe sent over for a while. So I told my story the way you people know it. I couldn't say I'd seen anything suspicious without maybe puttin' the blame on some innocent party, an' I didn't want that. I'd made up my mind that if anybody was arrested for the murder, an' things looked bad for them, I'd come out an' say I'd done it. Home, you'll find a confession all written out -- written out in case somethin' happened to me -- so nobody else'd ever be blamed. "That's why I had to say I'd never seen the lady here. I did see her -- saw her go into the buildin' that night -- the buildin' Gilmore had come out of. But I couldn't say so without makin' it look bad for her; so I lied. I could have thought up a better story if I'd had more time, I don't doubt, but I had to think quick. Anyways, I'm glad it's all over.

The uniformed policemen take Kelly out of the office, which now held McTighe, O'Gar, Cara Kenbrook, Stan Tennant, and Stark. Tennant had crosses to Stark's side, and is apologizing.

STAN

I hope you'll let me square myself for this evening's work. But you

(MORE)

STAN (cont'd)

know how it is when somebody you care for is in a jam. I'd have killed you if I had thought it would help Cara -- on the level. Why didn't you tell us that you didn't suspect her?

STARK

But I did suspect the pair of you, It looked as if Kelly had to be the guilty one; but you people carried on so much that I began to feel doubtful. For a while it was funny -- you thinking she had done it, and she thinking you had, though I suppose each had sworn to his or her innocence. But after a time it stopped being funny. You carried it too far.

O'GAR

How did you rap to Kelly?

STARK

Miss Kenbrook was walking north on Leavenworth -- and was halfway between Bush and Pine -- when the shot was fired. She saw nobody, no cars, until she rounded the corner. Mrs. Gilmore, walking north on Jones, was about the same distance away when she heard the shot, and she saw nobody until she reached Pine Street. If Kelly had been telling the truth, she would have seen him on Jones Street. He said he didn't turn the corner until after the shot was fired. Either of the women could have killed Gilmore, but hardly both; and I doubted that either could have shot him and got away without running into Kelly or the other. Suppose both of them were telling the truth -- what then? Kelly must have been lying! He was the logical suspect anyway -- the nearest known person to the murdered man when the shot was fired. To back all this up, he had let Miss Kenbrook go into the apartment building at three in the morning, in front of which a man

(MORE)

STARK (cont'd)  
 had just been killed, without  
 questioning her or mentioning her  
 in his report. That looked as if he  
 knew who had done the killing. So I  
 took a chance with the empty-shell  
 trick, it being a good bet that he  
 would have thrown his away, and  
 would think that --

MCTIGHE  
 (interjecting)  
 How about this assault charge?

Stan clears his throat.

STAN  
 Er--ah -- in view of the way things  
 have turned out, and knowing that  
 Miss Kenbrook doesn't want the  
 disagreeable publicity that would  
 accompany an affair of this sort,  
 why, I'd suggest that we drop the  
 whole thing.

(he smiles at Stark)  
 You know nothing has gone on the  
 records yet.

O'GAR  
 Make the big heap play his hand  
 out. Don't let him drop it.

MCTIGHE  
 Of course if Miss Kenbrook doesn't  
 want to press the charge, I  
 suppose--

STARK  
 If everybody understands that the  
 whole thing was a plant, and if the  
 policemen who heard the story are  
 brought in here now and told by  
 Tennant and Miss Kenbrook that it  
 was all a lie -- then I'm willing  
 to let it go at that. Otherwise, I  
 won't stand for a hush-up.

O'GAR  
 (whispering to Stark)  
 You're a damned fool! Put the  
 screws on them!

STARK

I don't see any sense in making a lot of trouble for myself just to make some for somebody else -- and suppose Tennant proved his story...

STARK (V.O.)

So the policemen were found, and brought into the office again, and told the truth.

CUT TO:

INT. HALL OF JUSTICE -- MINUTES LATER

Stark, Tennant, and Kenbrook are all walking down the hallway. Like old friends.

STARK (V.O.)

And presently Tennant, the girl, and I were walking together like three old friends through the corridors toward the door, Tennant still asking me to let him make amends for the evening's work.

They walk outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. HALL OF JUSTICE -- CONTINUOUS.

The three of them are standing at the top of the stairs to the Hall of Justice.

STAN

You've got to let me do something!  
It's only right!

(His hand dips into his coat,  
and comes out with a thick  
billfold.)

Here, Let me-

STARK

(taking the money)

No. Let me.

Stark tosses the money down to the bottom of the steps.  
Tennant goes racing after it.

Starks walks down the street.

STARK (V.O.)

Leaving his empty-faced lady love  
to watch over him, I strolled up  
through Portsmouth Square toward a  
restaurant where the steaks come  
thick.

FADE OUT.

THE END