

Dark Escort

by

Dr. Ument

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EXT. HOTEL VIRGIL - NIGHT

Battered by heavy wind and snow, the weathered old sign of the Hotel Virgil CLANGS in the storm wrought silence.

More like an old tenement building, the hotel is dark except for the pub, which makes up the first floor. A dirty neon sign flickers in the window.

A young couple fights through the snow drifts on the sidewalk.

CHAD, 20s, average build, glasses, clean cut, tries to keep up with VICKY, 20s, hot brunette with dangerous eyes.

CHAD

This place is a dump. Come on, let's drive to the next town.

VICKY

Where's your sense of adventure? Goddd.

INT. HOTEL VIRGIL - MOMENTS LATER

The long bar runs almost all the way to the end of the dimly lit room. A few tables along the wall, an old jukebox. It's been decades since anything changed in this place.

The bartender, BART, 40s, large shoulders, a beer gut and a handlebar mustache, smiles as Chad and Vicky enter.

The one customer, an OLD MAN in long, white hair, does not look up.

VICKY

You open?

BART

Yup.

They take a seat, Chad a little nervous.

VICKY

We'll take a pitcher of light beer, whatever.

As Bart pours the beer, Chad makes conversation.

CHAD

Where is everyone?

The wind outside rattles the sign as though to answer.

BART

Storms ain't so good for the bar business.

VICKY
What about the hotel?

Bart delivers the beer with a stern look.

BART
We gotta rule here. No one mentions
the hotel. Been closed for years
anyway, but the rule is, you mention
the hotel, you get tossed onto the
street.

CHAD
Come on...

BART
We ain't got many rules. Pretty much
that'n ya have to pay your tab is
about all. If it's yer first time, we
cut ya a break on the first rule. But
now ya've been warned. Don't mention
it again.

Vicky rolls her eyes.

LATER

The pitcher empty, Vicky chugs the rest of her mug. Chad lags behind.

VICKY
What's the matter, Chad, can't keep
up?

Chad blushes and picks up his beer.

Bart, annoyed, looks at his watch.

VICKY
Let's get shots!

Bart struggles to finish his beer.

VICKY
If you can handle shots.

CHAD
(to Bart)
Another pitcher and a couple of shots
of Jack. Set the old timer up with
one, too.

Bart doesn't move. He looks to the old man.

OLD MAN
Go ahead. Serve 'em, then take off.
I'll close up when they're done.

MOMENTS LATER

Bart, in winter gear and hat, heads for the door.

BART
I'll lock this so no one else comes
in.

The old man, still at the bar, nods and Bart exits.

Vicky smirks mischievously.

VICKY
(whispers)
Ask him.

CHAD
No.

She flashes her sexiest pout. He breaks down.

CHAD
Hey, mister, we wanted to ask you
somethin'.

BART
Answer's no, and you've been told the
rule.

Chad shrugs to Vicky, who gets up and walks over to the old man. Chad reluctantly follows.

Used to being noticed by men, she stands close to the old man. He does not look up.

VICKY
How 'bout if we buy us all another--

The old man turns. His eyes kill her words.

OLD MAN
Don't think I won't toss ya. Who's
gonna stop me?

He stares at Chad, sizes him up, visibly unimpressed. Vicky looks at Chad with disapproval.

Chad reaches into his pocket and pulls out a pistol, aims it at the old man.

OLD MAN
Ain't much in the register, boy.

CHAD

I don't care about the register. Tell us about the hotel. Why is it closed? What's the story?

The old man remains silent.

Chad fires a shot into the ground. Vicky seems scared and impressed at the same time. Chad, momentarily shocked by the blast, draws courage from her reaction.

CHAD

The story, out with it, old man.

Maybe deep down he wants to tell the story.

OLD MAN

I'm gonna need whiskey.

Vicky runs behind the bar, grabs a bottle, pours three shots.

VICKY

I always wanted to do this!

The old man and Vicky down their shot. Chad leaves his on the bar with the bottle. Vicky stays behind the bar.

OLD MAN

It was just after President Kennedy got himself assassinated. Night like tonight, first storm 'o the year. Me and my beautiful bride Eleanor were travelin' across country, a honeymoon trip. Storm drove us off the highway, into this town. We stopped here to have a drink, maybe stay the night. We weren't worth much, so places like this were about right for us. The proprietor was behind the bar, an old woman. When we inquired about a room, a few regulars shot us warning glances, but they were silenced by the glare o' the old woman.

Vicky refills the shot glass for the old man and herself.

OLD MAN

As the old woman dug around for a room key, an old timer, on the way out, whispered real quick that ain't no one spent the night here in many years. But it was snowin' fierce, and I was hungry for my new wife, so we took a room and we went up.

Vicky flashes a lustful grin at Chad, who blushes.

OLD MAN

We knew the place was old, but walking down that hall was like a journey into another time. Immaculate, she was, not a spec o' dust on the wall or dirt on the floor. But twasn't like any hotel I'd seen. Narrow hall, old style wallpaper, and lighting like it was put in by old Edison himself.

The old man's eyes grow distant, lost in his story.

OLD MAN

We had the run o' the place, as there were no other guests. But the two upper floors, they were off limits, we were told, and the stairway was roped off. Somethin' about a renovation.

The old man grabs the whiskey and pours himself a shot.

OLD MAN

Well, in the room, I was horny as a sailor in a whorehouse, the only thing I wanted to explore was my new bride. But for Eleanor, we were on an adventure, and she wanted to go huntin' around forbidden places. A woman with spirit's a difficult thing to resist, as I'm sure you understand, boy.

Chad reddens with embarrassment, Vicky inflates with pride.

OLD MAN

There was a candle in the room, and next thing you know, there we were, me and my princess, creeping up the dark stairs to the next floor. We started to inspect the lightless hallway, when we heard footsteps above on the top floor. She was an adventurous little kitten, my bride, and she pulled me back to the stairs and up we went.

The old man stops, the story too painful now.

VICKY

Go on, what happened?

OLD MAN

To our surprise, the hallway was lit, though barely.

(MORE)

OLD MAN (cont'd)

And at the end o' that hall, we could make out a chest o' some kind, like one o' them old traveling lockers, and the lid was wide open.

The old man pours another shot with shaking hands.

OLD MAN

My pretty princess couldn't stop herself, she ran right up the hall to that chest. I had to walk slow on account o' the candle, which I didn't wanna spill. When she got to the chest and looked in, she let out a gasp. But then somethin' caught her attention from the adjacent room. The door was ajar, and my poor girl disappeared into the room. I called her name, hustled to catch up, but the door slammed shut behind her. I heard the lock click.

The old man struggles.

OLD MAN

I can't say no more.

The old man bows his head.

CHAD

What happened?

OLD MAN

You can fire that gun, if ya like, but I can't speak of it. I can't.

CHAD

And now you own the place? How long you owned it?

OLD MAN

Almost fifty years.

VICKY

Fifty years? You said you were poor.

OLD MAN

Didn't cost all that much.

VICKY

What was in the chest? And what happened to your wife?

OLD MAN

Ain't enough whiskey in here to make me say any more.

VICKY
You're takin' us up then.

OLD MAN
You don't understand...

VICKY
Chad, tell him. We're goin' up, all three of us.

CHAD
I don't know, Vicky...

VICKY
When are you gonna grow a pair?

Chastened, Chad points the gun firmly.

CHAD
We're goin' up.

The old man is a picture of pain and sorrow.

INT. STAIRWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Under weak electrical light, the three of them ascend the stairs, the old man in front. Vicky has an excited look, Chad appears unsure. He holds the gun by his side.

VICKY
Maybe we'll see Eleanor.

The old man glances at her, his face unreadable.

OLD MAN
I would...

VICKY
What?

He says nothing.

They reach the entrance to the hallway and the old man flicks a light switch.

HALLWAY

They walk between walls warped with age and covered by elaborate wallpaper illuminated by ancient light fixtures.

VICKY
Is that where the chest was? At the end of the hall?

The old man simply nods.

They reach the end of the hall, Vicky filled with excitement. The door to her left is slightly ajar.

VICKY
Is this the room?

The old man does not reply. Vicky pushes open the door, carefully at first.

CHAD
Vicky, don't.

She gives him an impish grin, and steps into the--

BEDROOM

She finds a light switch by the door, turns it on.

There, by the window, is the closed chest. Falling snow outside the window glows yellow from a street light.

VICKY
There it is!

Chad follows her into the room, grabs her from behind.

CHAD
Vicky, leave it. We've done enough to this man. Let's go.

She shrugs him off, moves again toward the chest, when Chad notices the old man is gone.

CHAD
Where'd he go?

They both stop and look toward the door. Chad hustles to the--

HALLWAY

No sign of the old man.

CHAD
Hey!

Still no sign.

The bedroom door suddenly slams shut.

CHAD
Vicky!

He rattles the doorknob. Locked.

BEDROOM

She runs to the door, tries it herself.

CHAD (O.S.)
Unlock it from your side.

VICKY
It's stuck!

CHAD (O.S.)
Stand back!

She moves away from the door.

She gazes in horror at her reflection in an antique mirror on the wall.

An image of herself, aged by decades.

HALLWAY

Chad points the pistol at the doorknob, unsure how to do it.

Suddenly Vicky SCREAMS.

Chad fights panic, not sure where to fire. Finally, he fires two rounds into the doorknob.

He seizes the knob and shakes it. No avail.

CHAD
Vicky!

BEDROOM

Vicky turns from the mirror, her hand to her cheek. She moves to the chest, slowly reaches to open it.

Her attention is drawn out the window, to the street below.

A MAN stands by a four horse carriage. In a long, dark coat and a tall hat, he is enshrouded in shadow.

A gas street lamp reveals the drifting snow, bathes the scene in soft yellow.

The man suddenly looks up right at her. His features remain invisible in shadow, except for the whites of his eyes.

HALLWAY

Chad is desperate, tries the door again. He turns to see the old man returning, looks at him helplessly.

CHAD
She's locked in.

The old man stands before him.

OLD MAN
Give me the gun.

Chad, frightened, hands the pistol to the old man, who inspects it.

OLD MAN
I told ya not to mention the hotel.

CHAD
I'm sorry. I just wanted...

OLD MAN
To impress her. I know.

The old man inserts a key into the door, jiggles it. Nothing.

He points the pistol into the keyhole, fires. Sparks in the dim light. The knob hangs loose.

They storm into the--

BEDROOM

The window open, snowflakes drift in and the curtain stirs in the breeze.

They run to the window.

Vicky descends to the bottom of a fire escape. The man in the dark coat holds the door to the carriage open and waits.

CHAD
Vicky!

She does not respond. Neither does the black coated man.

Vicky walks the sidewalk to the carriage, little foot prints in the fresh snow.

CHAD
Get away from there!

She ignores.

The old man aims the pistol with trembling hands at the man in black. The man looks up then, his face still in shadow except for the whites of his eyes and the teeth of his wide grin.

Vicky enters the carriage. The old man cannot bring himself to shoot. The dark escort enters the carriage behind Vicky, closes the door. The carriage bursts away at high gallop.

CHAD

Vicky!

Chad runs from the bedroom, the old man right behind him.

EXT. HOTEL VIRGIL - MOMENTS LATER

Chad hurries out, putting on his jacket and fumbling for his keys. The old man pursues.

CHAD

I'm goin' after her.

OLD MAN

Hold on a second. Think.

CHAD

I'm gettin' the car, I'll follow
the...

They look at the ground. Unbroken snow. They glance at the street light. Modern, bright white.

OLD MAN

That's what I'm sayin'.

CHAD

No tracks. That's impossible.

OLD MAN

Come inside, boy. There's only one
thing to do.

Chad looks at the old man, afraid of what he'll say. The old man's eyes are full of sympathy.

OLD MAN

Wait.

They walk back into the hotel.