

L.A. Noir

by

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FADE IN:

INT. RAY'S ROOM - NIGHT

A pinpoint of light in RAY MUNDO'S (33) eye.

RAY(VO)

Am I destined to be a great writer?  
I ask myself obsessed with my reflection  
in the window.

He steadies his heavy breathing as he tenses his face in pain.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)

Is this the stuff my books will be made  
of, or am I just talking to myself,  
writing for no one, living with false  
hope, giving myself and life meaning  
that isn't there?

He clutches his bloody chest with his hand as he coughs up  
blood.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)

So then I tell myself, you'll be dead  
before you know it, so why not.

Sprawled out on the floor, he writhes in a pool of blood that  
spreads out from his body.

INT. RAY'S ROOM - EARLY MORNING

An alarm clock goes off. Ray pulls the sheets over his head.

The annoying alarm nags at him to get up.

His hand feels the floor until it comes upon an old revolver.  
His hand moves to the side of the revolver and finally smacks  
the alarm off.

RAY(VO)

I am the housekeeper who dresses the  
bed, sponges the dishes, dusts and  
sweeps and mops, sorts, washes, dries,  
hangs and folds the laundry...

Disheveled with days-old stumble on his face and dressed in t-  
shirt and boxers, he drags himself off a single spring  
mattress on the floor. Lusters over to a cluttered work table

a few feet away. Sits down at an old, hard-looking, wooden chair.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
 ...wipes down the crumb-filled counters  
 and spit-stained mirrors and scrubs the  
 tub and toilet all to keep from going  
 mad..

As part of his daily ritual, he pours himself a shot of tequila and downs it. Lights a cigarette with a match. Turns the knob to an old radio and jazz crackles on.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
 ...because when you wake up there is no  
 answer as to what today means and how  
 you should greet the day and how you  
 should proceed and how you should feel—

He inserts a virginal white piece of paper into an antique manual typewriter.

He bangs out the following:

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
 ...no instructions, no warranty, no  
 satisfaction guaranteed.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

The apartment door to lucky number '13' opens. Out steps Ray in a shabby coat and tie, with a beat-up briefcase in hand, and black-frame glasses masking his face.

He locks the door and hurries along a dark and depressing hallway.

EXT. BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

Ray races to catch a bus sitting idle at the bus stop. He's about to reach the bus stop when the bus lumbers away. Shit, missed it again.

He plops down on the bench to catch his breath. Pulls out a walkman from his briefcase and puts it on. Jazz pours out.

He also takes out a black journal and SCRIBBLES furiously away:

RAY(VO)

You can't imagine what these eyes have seen: all the clear-sky dawns with the blackbirds in formation...

Another bus arrives.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Ray boards and makes his way past the other seated COMMUTERS.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
...all of God's mutated faces on the bus...

He takes refuge at a seat in the back of the bus and stares out the window.

DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

Buildings - historical landmarks, shiny skyscrapers and refurbished lofts.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
...all the meaningless buildings and little side streets I often wonder about and have lost myself in endless times...

Crowded streets with passersby - HOMELESS, BUSINESS PEOPLE, and IMMIGRANT WORKERS.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
...all the countless angles and colors and shades of the sun through the window burning at my temple, all the soul-worn nights with traffic stringing along like Christmas lights...

The bus lurches to a stop.

Annoyed, Ray turns his attention to the front of the bus.

Dressed all in black, sporting long boots, a short skirt, a sexy top, and a silk scarf, a MYSTERIOUS YOUNG WOMAN (22) boards the bus. She looks and moves like a cold and detached runway model as she makes her way down the aisle.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
...all the ghosts of you haunting my every restless night and waking moment...

As she nears him, he lowers his gaze and busies himself by SCRIBBLING in his journal.

She sits upright at an empty seat across the way from him.

As discreetly as he can, he eyes her.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)

...while your eyes only continue to see  
more of the same bleak bottom line I  
always knew was buried there but, not  
knowing better, disregarded...

With black-painted fingernails, the Mysterious Young Woman fishes out a compact and lipstick from her black hand purse.

Without removing her black shades, she applies black lipstick to her full lips. She runs her hand through her long, raven black hair as she looks in the mirror at her otherwise pale face.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)

For when it comes to love, sweetheart,  
we are but blind and senseless.

Finished, the Mysterious Young Woman puts away her compact and lipstick and turns her head to look out her window.

Ray snaps out of it and turns to look out his own window.

Having missed his stop, he panics and tugs on the cord to request a stop.

The bus brakes.

Ray pulls and pushes on the back door to get out. But it's stuck.

He's just about to call out to the bus driver, when the door opens.

EXT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Ray glances up at the bus as he steps off.

The Mysterious Young Woman looks down at him from her window, expressionless.

He looks after the bus as it takes off down the street.

He glances at his watch.

The second hand has stopped moving.

He puts it up to his ear. No ticking.

He shakes it as he bounds across the street. Rushes up to a

shiny, metallic building towering into the sky.

INT. OFFICE, CUBICLE - DAY

JAZZ purrs from a RADIO. Photos of writers Charles Bukowski, John Fante, Jack Kerouac and Henry Miller decorate the otherwise sterile cubicle wall.

Stacks of paper surround Ray as he crunches numbers on a spreadsheet on his computer monitor.

He stops to rub his dry eyes. Grabs a pack of cigarettes by his monitor. Jumps out of his chair.

CORRIDOR

He strides through a maze of cubicles with OTHER WORKERS in them moving like stiff robots.

BATHROOM

Standing by an open window, Ray takes a long drag from a cigarette. He looks out as he blows the smoke.

The Mysterious Young Woman stands on the sidewalk down below, looking up at him.

He turns his head back to the bathroom and hesitates. It couldn't possibly be her. Or could it?

He glances out the window again.

But the Mysterious Young Woman is gone.

He shakes his head, takes one last drag, pitches it in a toilet and flushes.

EXT. PIGEON SQUARE - LUNCHTIME

A book cover reads, 'How to Cheat Death and Live to Tell About It'.

Ray puts the book down as he bites into an apple. Sitting at a bench, he observes the people walking and milling about.

Across the street, he catches a glimpse of the Mysterious Young Woman as she strolls by.

He bolts up after her, but still stays back a safe distance.

As she glances back, he ducks to the side, so as not to be seen.

She turns back and smiles to herself as he continues to pursue her.

She slips into the Grand Central Market.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL MARKET - CONTINUOUS

Ray negotiates his way through the throng of CONSUMERS in the colorful labyrinth who pick over merchandise and eat at food stands.

He sees the Mysterious Young Woman ahead.

But then she disappears into the crowd. And reappears going in another direction.

He spins around as he sees her all around him.

He even grabs on to a fruit stand to keep from getting dizzy.

He stares down at a rotten piece of fruit with flies swarming around it.

He shakes it off. Looks around again.

But she's nowhere in sight.

EXT. GRAND CENTRAL MARKET - CONTINUOUS

He runs out and looks up and down the street for the Mysterious Young Woman.

He locates her just as she slips into the Bradbury building across the street.

INT. BRADBURY BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Ray rushes into the building just as the Mysterious Young Woman boards an elevator, and the doors close shut.

He spies the elevator numbers light up to the top floor. He jumps into another elevator.

TOP FLOOR

Ray gets off the elevator just as the door to the rooftop closes shut.

EXT. BRADBURY BUILDING, ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

Ray steps out onto the rooftop and searches for her.

But no sign of the Mysterious Young Woman.

He dares himself over to the edge of the rooftop and stares down at the street far below.

The cars look like miniatures. The people like ants.

RAY(VO)

The wheel grinds on; humanity advances,  
and the skyscrapers scrape deeper into  
space and those who plummet to their  
death, plummet to their death, their  
last yells go unheard, unremembered...

A barrage of downtown images builds and intensifies to a maddening crescendo as if everything were suddenly to explode into oblivion.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)

...but you are young, and the time is now  
and there is no time, and yet your heart  
is sick because you can't make the music  
you hear on the radio, the lingering  
lyrics, the driving beat, the sea for  
others to swim in.

Ray squeezes his eyes shut as he gets vertigo and wavers back and forth.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - EVENING

The main door opens. Head down, Ray steps out with his briefcase in hand.

EXT. BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

The last rays of daylight shoot out from behind buildings as Ray waits for the bus and listens to jazz from his walkman.

He nervously glances around.

A parade of HOMELESS, JUNKIES, PROSTITUTES, PIMPS, AND DRUG DEALERS.

RAY(VO)

I hate as the light dies away at the end of the day and night creeps in, and the beautifully warm day is gone forever, and I cannot recover it ever, and I can never decide how best to preserve it, how best to bask in it, how to live it forever.

Ray digs into his pocket and hands a begging HOMELESS WOMAN whatever change he has.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)

For as I turn the same tortured thought in my head, the pristine blue is eaten by the cancer black...

A bus arrives and covers him from our view.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)

...and then I realize that I have wasted yet another day and that I am ever closer to never again.

The bus departs, and the bus stop is empty.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

The bus is jam-packed. Whether he likes it or not, Ray has to make bodily contact as he rubs past other commuters.

There just happens to be an empty seat by a window at the very back. But the Mysterious Young Woman guards access to it on the aisle seat.

Ray is about to turn face when she slides over to the empty window seat.

He eases himself into the aisle seat she was sitting in and avoids looking at her.

But he can't help but sneak a sideways peak as she shifts in her seat and pulls up on the edge of her skirt to reveal some

thigh.

She accidentally knocks her hand purse to the bus floor.

He instantly reacts by picking up the purse and handing it to her.

She studies him over the top of her black shades, revealing the darkest, most beautiful eyes.

Hypnotized, he just stares back at her as she gets up and slides past him, facing him, and exits through the back door.

He jumps out of his seat and shoves hard out the back door before the bus moves on again.

EXT. BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

Ray jerks his head up and down the sidewalk.

But the Mysterious Young Woman has managed to disappear on him yet again.

He looks after the bus as it lumbers away. He casts his head down and grimaces.

A gutter with a dead rat beside it.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Ray hurries back to his tenement and glances behind him from time to time.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Ray practically runs down the dark and depressing hallway until he reaches the haven that is his apartment.

He fumbles the key to open the lock to lucky number '13'. Slams the door shut once he's in. Locks the deadbolt.

RAY(VO)

And in the evening, when you return home, a hook, you wish you had...

INT. RAY'S ROOM - NIGHT

A hand dumps a can of soup into a small pan heating over a

burner.

Ray stands over the pan stirring it.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
 ...to hang your head upon, and forget the  
 world outside.

MINUTES LATER

Jazz accompanies words as they type out onto a blank piece of paper:

RAY(VO)  
 Singles ad: car needs new brakes, paint  
 touchup; want new car. Broken futon  
 slat needs brace. Want real bed.

Ray continues to pound at his typewriter with one hand while he drags on his cigarette with the other.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
 Apartment needs posters and photos hung  
 on the walls, carpet, kitchen table,  
 beads, lamp, tapestry, loveseat.

Takes a swig from a bottle of wine as he continues typing.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
 Poetry collection needs to be finished  
 first of all, then formatted, then  
 edited, then critiqued, then sent out.

A crashing noise outside disrupts his flow. He stops.  
 Remains still.

No more noises, he continues.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
 Face needs plastic surgery, braces, eye  
 laser surgery, a chemical peel. Want  
 new body.

A hard knock at the door.

He hesitates. Ignores it. Types faster and harder.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)  
 Mind needs sleep, rest, clarity, a  
 positive outlook. Want death, but

really need love.

A second knock at the door. Louder. More urgent.

He stops.

Unable to ignore it any longer, he stomps over to his bedside and grabs the revolver next to the alarm clock.

He hides the revolver behind his back as he approaches the door.

He swallows hard, undoes the lock with slow deliberation and finally opens the door.

The Mysterious Young Woman removes her shades and flashes him a gorgeous smile that can't be refused.

Despite himself, he manages a slight smile back.

She steps in and surveys the threadbare room.

His worktable catches her eye, and she makes her way over to it.

He tenses up again as she runs her long fingers over the keys of his typewriter.

She turns back to him as she picks up the still-lit cigarette sitting in the ashtray. She takes a long drag and blows the smoke out in his direction.

She then grabs the wine bottle and takes a long drink. Provocatively licking her wine-stained lips, she seems to beckon him with her hypnotic gaze.

He draws closer to her.

And it looks as if they're going to have an intimate moment when he pulls out the gun from behind him and points it at her.

Unalarmed, she touches his gun-holding hand.

He opens his mouth to say something to her. But she moves in to kiss him.

Their lips quiver and are just about to touch when the gun fires.

An intensely bright, white light in the shape of a skull blows out the image.

Shrouded in darkness, Ray's face is now completely at peace.  
[Our eyes should create the optical illusion of seeing the  
white skull superimposed on Ray's face.]

RAY(VO)

Am I destined to be a great writer?  
I ask myself obsessed with my reflection  
in the window. Is this the stuff my  
books will be made of...

The pool of blood absorbs back into his body, as does the  
blood on his chest and the blood he coughed up.

RAY(VO) (CONT'D)

...or am I just talking to myself, writing  
for no one, living with false hope,  
giving myself and life meaning  
that isn't there? So then I tell  
myself, you'll be dead before you know  
it, so why not.

The pinpoint of light in Ray's eye.

FADE OUT