

"Gretchen Whalon"

EXT. GRETCHEN'S HOUSE - PATIO/SWIMMING POOL - LATE NIGHT

6/9/15

Porch lights on. Find Gretchen Whalon chain-smoking and drinking vodka as she lays out SCRIPT PAGES on her patio. A FEW DOZEN PAGES lined up in columns. She hovers, reads, deliberates. Then... grabs a handful of pages and SCATTERS THEM IN THE POOL, frustrated. Long drag off her cigarette --

I
START →

TOM (O.S.)

You think that'll wipe the stench off?

Gretchen turns and sees Tom standing on the back patio.

GRETCHEN

Worth a shot.

TOM

What's it called?

GRETCHEN

No. Now, I really can't tell you.

TOM

Oh, this is gonna be good.

GRETCHEN

"Genius at Work."

Gretchen can't help but laugh. Tom smiles. She looks at him.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

So. You're... here. Why?

TOM

I thought you looked a little taller than last time I saw you. Wanted to double-check. ...It's been a while since you've come to one of my premieres, Gretchen.

GRETCHEN

Stanley wanted to talk to you.

TOM

Just Stanley?

GRETCHEN

That's what I said.

Tom takes that on the chin. And yet still, he persists...

Paradise Pictures

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TOM

Tomorrow night, wanna catch the new Alan Ladd, Veronica Lake flick? "The Blue Dahlia." Raymond Chandler wrote the script. You love Raymond Chandler.

GRETCHEN

And you love Veronica Lake.

TOM

I've heard good things. And hey, even if it's a piece of shit, when's the last time you and me had a bad time at the movies?

A beat. Gretchen considers the offer, but then says...

GRETCHEN

I can't. I'm busy.

TOM

With "Genius at Work"? C'mon, Miss RKO, you could write that thing in your sleep.

GRETCHEN

If you can figure out a way to make that happen, I'd love to hear it.

A beat. Tom nods at her and starts off, then stops and turns.

TOM

How are things over at RKO?

GRETCHEN

They're fine.
(narrows her eyes)
Why do you ask?

TOM

No reason.

GRETCHEN

How are things at Paradise Pictures?

A long beat, and then Tom offers up a rueful smile.

TOM

Never better.

And as Tom turns and walks out, we SMASH CUT TO:

STOP

2/7

II

START

INT. TOM KIRBY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Tom's sitting at his desk, staring out the window at the nighttime Hollywood skyline. He's holding a glass of whiskey. A KNOCK at his open door. And Gretchen enters.

TOM

Front gate give you any trouble?

GRETCHEN

They never do.

TOM

Because they know if they did, they'd have to answer to me.

GRETCHEN

So where's this script?

Tom drains his whiskey and then he makes his way over to her. He hands her Wyatt Osborne's "Heart of Darkness" script.

TOM

I'm gonna need big parts for Isabelle Yates and Aldo Boyd, too.

GRETCHEN

(thinking)

She can be Kurtz's fiancée. And Aldo can be the guide taking Marlow up the river. I'll make sure that role has some meat on its bones.

(a beat, and then)

I still can't believe he's letting you make it.

TOM

What, you don't think it's box-office gold? A movie about how evil lurks in the heart of every man.

GRETCHEN

You think it lurks in yours, Tom?

TOM

That's why I like this story.

(a beat, and then)

Marlow's looking for Kurtz, right? But he's really looking for himself. And the question is, is he gonna become the monster he's hunting?

GRETCHEN

So they're the same person, at different stages of the same journey?

TOM

It's like this place. We're all two people. Who we were when we got here... and who we became once we decided to stay.

GRETCHEN

You get so serious when you drink.

TOM

You've heard it all before.

GRETCHEN

Yes, I have.

Tom grins and makes his way to a radio on a bookshelf. Fiddles with the tuner, until he finds a song he likes, Ink Spot's "The Gypsy." He walks back to Gretchen, looks at her.

TOM

What do you say?

GRETCHEN

I don't think so, Tom.

TOM

C'mon, one song.

Tom steps closer to her. He takes one of her hands. A beat. She stands. Tom puts his other hand on her waist. And as the song continues, she lets her guard down, moves close to him. She rests her head on his shoulder. Comfortable and safe.

TOM (CONT'D)

I have to tell you something. Holtzie's selling the studio to your bosses over at RKO.

She slowly moves her head from his shoulder and looks at him.

GRETCHEN

What? I haven't heard that. That's why you came by the other night. You wanted to see if I knew.

TOM

No, I'd just found out, and I wanted to see you.

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GRETCHEN

Tom...

TOM

Old habits, right?

GRETCHEN

How many people know?

TOM

Not many. They're keeping it under wraps.

GRETCHEN

So this movie is your swan song.

TOM

Looks like it.

Gretchen shakes her head. She's pissed on Tom's behalf.

GRETCHEN

Holtzie built the studio on your back, and now he's squandered it.

TOM

Hey, I wanted the studio on my back.

GRETCHEN

You wanted to be Irving Thalberg.

TOM

What an idea, huh?

GRETCHEN

Forget Irving Thalberg. You've done a pretty good job being Tom Kirby.

TOM

You think so?

GRETCHEN

You know you have, Tom.

Tom looks at her. She looks at him. It's a loaded moment. And then Tom leans in to kiss Gretchen. And she closes her eyes. But... as their lips touch, Gretchen pulls away.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)

I... I have to go. I'll have some pages for you in a few days, okay? You should get some sleep, Tom.

STOP

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Gretchen takes the "Heart of Darkness" script and walks out the front door. As the Ink Spots continue to croon for Tom...

III
START →

EXT. THE POLO LOUNGE AT THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - DAY - LATER

Tom stands with Gretchen in a corner, away from the crowd.

GRETCHEN
He would've liked this.

TOM
You think so?

She motions at a LARGE PHOTO on an easel... of "THE SHERIFF."

GRETCHEN
This is exactly how he wanted us to remember him.

TOM
The only thing I can remember right now... is seeing that casket go in the ground. With him in it. Never seen anything lonelier in my entire life.

Tom then tries to find the words to say what's on his mind.

TOM (CONT'D)
Last night, you said you were afraid of me needing you. I get that. How could I not?
(a long beat, then)
But what if the studio being sold is actually a good thing? What if we were meant to do this movie together... and then get back to where we used to be?

Gretchen slowly shuts her eyes, and when she opens them again she looks right into his. Shakes her head as she says...

GRETCHEN
That's not what's supposed to happen, Tom.

TOM
Why not? C'mon, we can do whatever we want --

GRETCHEN
No. We can't.

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She takes a moment, looks off in the distance, then at Tom.

GRETCHEN (CONT'D)
Dean is coming home.

TOM
What?
(a beat)
But I thought...

GRETCHEN
Because of Stanley. He asked to be relieved of duty. So he could be here for me. He gets on a plane tonight out of Germany.

TOM
So he'll be back tomorrow.

Gretchen looks at Tom. Her eyes are getting moist. But she takes a deep breath, slowly wipes them and forces a smile.

GRETCHEN
Three years.

TOM
Seems like a lot longer than that. I'm happy for you. I'm happy he's finally coming home, safe and sound.

GRETCHEN
Thank you, Tom.
(a beat, and then)
And besides, we both know what's going to happen with the studio.

TOM
What's that?

GRETCHEN
You're going to save it, or die trying.

Gretchen leans up and kisses him on the cheek. Her lips stay there for a moment, then she walks away. Tom watches her go.

STOP

7/7