

The Schnook

by

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FADE IN:

A BOOK PRINTING PRESS - 1960s

It's going full speed - mechanical, not digital. Metal clanking, gears reciprocating. Lots of noise.

HARRY (V/O)

In 1961, Catch-22 was published.
So were James and the Giant Peach,
The Bronze Bow, and Where the Red
Fern Grows. Great books, all of
them.

(beat)

None of them were printed by the
Cardinal Press, of Maplewood, New
Jersey.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN MAPLEWOOD, NEW JERSEY - SUNNY SUMMER DAY,
1961

A neat little downtown - small town America personified.
This is still "Eisenhower America", prim and proper,
prosperous and bland as hell. There is Memorial Park off
Main Street, and a swanky hot dog cart is parked outside
the entrance. Next to the park is a slightly worse-for-wear
Greyhound Bus Station.

HARRY (V/O)

Maplewood is nice. Nice little
downtown. Nice quick commute into
Manhattan. Nice little park with a
nice little pond and nice little
boats for tourists, of whom there
are none. You may know Maplewood
because in 1921 a man named Lowell
invented the golf tee here.

A small, red 1954 Commer Express delivery van pulls into
view. It has "Cardinal Press" on the outside. It carefully
stops next to the main gates of the park. A man gets out.
He is 31, tall but with a stoop, a thin frame, square jaw,
and large eyes. He has on a natty black suit, white shirt
and red tie, and a hat with a bright red feather in it. His
belt is large, black and shiny, as are his shoes. He
retrieves a bundle of papers from the back, and walks into
"FAN'S CHINESE RESTAURANT".

HARRY (V/O) (CONT'D)

The Cardinal Press, where I work,
is a family business.

(MORE)

HARRY (V/O) (CONT'D)
 It's not a big name, but is the starting point for a lot of big names. We don't bid for the big hardbacks anymore - the new releases and prestige jobs - we print paperbacks, magazines and comic books, and we do local work in Maplewood. It's a small shop, but - we like to think - important.

The man emerges from the restaurant with a smaller bundle of papers and walks to the stationers shop, ducking his head into the doorway.

HARRY (V/O) (CONT'D)
 Well, it's important to me, because I'm Harry Cardinal and my family own it.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN ST - MAPLEWOOD - SUNNY SUMMER DAY

HARRY walks down the street jauntily, a parcel in each hand, nodding to passersby and smiling cheerfully.

HARRY (V/O)
 I was born on Black Thursday in 1929, the very start of the Depression, which my father said was portentous, given my attitude. I'm 31 years old, single, and have submitted my novel to over 75 different publishers in the last year with not even a response from any of them. Every day I go out on delivery at 11:00. Tuesday and Friday I go into Manhattan for big drops, and on other days I do local deliveries, around Maplewood.

He places the PARCEL in his left hand down outside a BUTCHER'S SHOP and checks his watch. It is 1:03pm.

HARRY (V/O) (CONT'D)
 My deliveries are usually done by 1 or so, so I have some time before I head back to the office. I park on Main Street and visit Gus and his Hot Dog Cart.

HARRY starts back towards the HOT DOG CART and his VAN, crossing the street carefully - narrowly avoiding a speeding car that almost hits him. He gestures at the driver in exasperation as he approaches the HOT DOG CART.

HARRY (V/O) (CONT'D)
Gus knows my order - beef hotdog
with ketchup, and a medium
Coca-Cola, and has it waiting.

HARRY passes the HOT DOG CART without stopping, reaches his van and leans in the driver's side window, picks up a brown paper bag, turns and walks straight into Memorial Park, bypassing the HOT DOG CART.

HARRY (V/O) (CONT'D)
But today I'm not going to see
Gus. I'm not going back to the
office either. Today I'm going to
Memorial Park, where no tourists
ever go, to sit by the pond, watch
the empty boats bob along, have a
corned beef sandwich, and end my
life.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEMORIAL PARK - SUNNY SUMMER DAY

HARRY sits under a tree, looking at the pond. The empty boats bob at their moorings. There is no one else around. Behind him, his VAN is visible in the background.

HARRY finishes his sandwich and, licking his fingers, stands up. His jacket and hat are in a neat pile. He pulls off his belt and loops it over a low hanging branch. He hefts it, hard. The branch sways and creaks, but holds.

Behind him, a WOMAN walks along and stops next to the van.

HARRY slides the belt around itself, making a noose.

The WOMAN glances around, nervously. She quickly leans into the van.

HARRY places the noose over his head and draws it tight. He looks out at the river with a sigh.

The WOMAN is now hanging from the VAN DOOR at the waist. She has a RIDICULOUSLY tight black-and-white striped over-the-knee pencil skirt on, and 3-inch heels. She loses her balance and falls into the VAN, feet kicking wildly, and she sounds the HORN on the VAN with a loud bleat.

HARRY is startled by the noise and whips his head around to look. He sees the skirt and the flailing legs, catches his breath with a startled smile. When the WOMAN pulls herself back to the ground and looks around furtively, fixing her hair, he catches a glimpse of the rest of her.

She is stunningly good looking - an obvious Marilyn Monroe clone, artfully done. She's GWENNIE, 23, and now she's flustered. She re-composes herself and reaches back into the VAN.

HARRY
 (to himself)
 Hey...
 (louder)
 HEY! HEY!

He starts forward, and quickly chokes himself. He wrestles with the belt, clawing at it and yanking it off the branch.

GWENNIE, hearing him, whirls around with a squeak, but can't see where the noise was coming from. She turns back to the VAN and leans back in.

HARRY slides the belt off the tree, picks up his jacket and hat, and begins running towards his VAN, unfastening the belt from his neck as he goes. After about ten steps, he realises his pants are falling down.

He reaches the gate and starts towards the VAN, holding his pants up with one hand and his jacket and hat in the other.

HARRY (CONT'D)
 Hey! Hey you! That's my van!

GWENNIE spins round and sees him.

She turns back into the VAN.

GWENNIE
 Lola, we're rumbled!

CUT TO:

INT. CARDINAL VAN

Lying on the floor of the passenger side of the VAN, using a butter knife to pry open a briefcase, is LOLA. LOLA is 24, brunette, has thin glasses, and is wearing tan capri slacks, a dark blue blouse and flats. It is obvious that this burglary is a well-practised routine.

LOLA
Dammit Gwennie! Get out of here!
Lose him!

GWENNIE turns and sees HARRY closing in. She squeaks and tries to run. She can barely move in the skirt, but does her best to vamoose.

At this point, HARRY has almost caught up, but as he lunges at GWENNIE he trips over his pants. GWENNIE skitters away with a bleat and makes for the park. HARRY, getting up, throws the belt and his jacket into the VAN, then flings his hat after them, but it flies all the way across, out the window, and into the street. The noose of the belt stops right in front of LOLA's fear-frozen face. She stares at it in amazement, then alarm.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEMORIAL PARK - SUNNY SUMMER DAY

HARRY continues in pursuit of GWENNIE, holding up his pants, scraped and dirtied, looking like a Swamp Monster while GWENNIE wiggles away as fast as she can.

In the park, GWENNIE turns around and lets out a yelp of fear at the sight of HARRY gaining on her, and trips on a tree root, going down in a heap.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. CARDINAL VAN - SUNNY SUMMER DAY

LOLA, still in the VAN, hears the yelp and stabs the knife into the briefcase reflexively. It pops open, and we see a book manuscript, "Lost Time" by Harry Cardinal. LOLA stares at it, then grabs the manuscript and stuffs it into her bag. She slides out of the VAN, grabs HARRY's hat from the street, and runs after GWENNIE and HARRY.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEMORIAL PARK - SUNNY SUMMER DAY

HARRY, seeing GWENNIE struggling to get back up, stops short and stares.

HARRY
Hey...Hey, excuse me?

GWENNIE
You stay away from me! I'll
scream!

HARRY
You'll scream? I'm the one who
should be--

GWENNIE lets out a PIERCING, classic Hollywood Siren
scream.

LOLA, arriving on the scene, smacks HARRY in the back with
her bag, letting his hat go flying. HARRY awkwardly catches
it.

LOLA
You get away from her!

HARRY spins to confront LOLA in surprise. He is more
confused than angry, but is very riled up.

LOLA (CONT'D)
(startled)
And me!
(to a PASSERBY on the
street)
Hey, help!

The PASSERBY looks in. He is a small Chinese man wearing a
suit.

PASSERBY
Mr Cardinal? You all right?

HARRY
(reassuringly)
Yes, Mr Fan. Everything's fine.

LOLA
(desperately)
No it isn't! This man is going to
abduct us and do unspeakable
things to us in a darkened forest!

MR FAN looks around.

MR FAN
There isn't a dark forest around
here. There's a golf course--

LOLA stares, transfixed in horror. HARRY waves at MR FAN.

HARRY
Thank you Mr Fan, I'll see you
next week with the new flyers!

MR FAN gives a nod and walks on.

LOLA tries to help GWENNIE up, but cannot manage it by herself. HARRY starts over.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Let me help -

He reaches out and takes GWENNIE's arm and begins helping her up. She smiles at him sweetly.

LOLA
(barging in)
No thank you! Gwennie! Don't let him...

GWENNIE is up.

GWENNIE
(1000-watt smile now)
Why thank you, Mister...?

HARRY
(completely taken in)
Cardinal. But you can call me Harry.
(beat)
Because it's my name.

GWENNIE
(extending her hand,
palm down)
Gwendylon Klueskens. Gwennie...
(nods at LOLA)
And she's Lola. Lola Katz.

HARRY takes GWENNIE'S hand and shakes it, and continues to hold it.

HARRY
Klues...Koosman?

GWENNIE
Klueskens. It's Pennsylvania Dutch originally...

HARRY
Oh right...You girls from out of town?

GWENNIE
Why yes!
(beat)
(MORE)

GWENNIE (CONT'D)

Trying to get to New York, but our driver told us this was as far as we could go.

LOLA

Look, Mister Cardinal - we weren't stealing anything...

HARRY blinks and drops GWENNIE's hand. He's come out of his trance.

GWENNIE shoots LOLA a "What are you doing? I had him!" look.

HARRY

Hey...Yeah - what were you doing in my van?

LOLA opens her mouth to speak, but GWENNIE suddenly breaks down in tears and stumbles artfully into HARRY, pressing against him.

GWENNIE

Oh Harry! It's been so hard!
(backing off, then
crashing back into his
chest)
Such a long road to find someone
who understands just how hard it
is for a girl like me--

LOLA

(raising her eyebrows
and inspecting her
nails)
--like us--

GWENNIE

-to leave everything she knows
behind in the hope of finding the
bright lights of the city shining
on her...Oh, how I have longed for
this place, Harry,--

HARRY

(bewildered, looking
around)
--the park?

LOLA rolls her eyes at both of them.

GWENNIE
 (soldiering on)
 For this chance to maybe find
 someone who cares enough for
 little me to make...
 (looking up into his
 face)
All my dreams come true...

HARRY is enraptured, hanging on every word. His chest puffs up and he squares his already square jaw.

HARRY
 (an octave lower)
 Well don't you worry, Miss
 Kloos...erm...Gwennie. This might
 be a small town, but we have big
 hearts.
 (he takes her hand
 gently)
 Do you have somewhere to stay? Of
 course you don't! Look, my family
 run a boarding house - it's not
 fancy but you can get your
 bearings.

GWENNIE
 Really? That's ever so kind of
 you...

HARRY beams at her.

LOLA
 (under her breath)
 Here we go...

GWENNIE smiles another megawatt smile and takes HARRY's arm and they stroll back to the VAN, HARRY proudly holding up his pants as he walks. LOLA follows, a few steps behind.

HARRY deposits GWENNIE in the passenger seat tenderly, closes the door gently and turns to LOLA.

HARRY
 (gesturing towards the
 rear of the van)
 Back's open.

He walks around to the driver's side. LOLA walks to the back and stares at the door of the van. There are two cardboard suitcases on the ground that she picks up.

LOLA
 Every damn time...