

SPIRITS AND SMOKE

LOGLINE: A surprise visit from an alluring young woman launches a hard-boiled detective on a perilous case in search of her missing daughter.

OVER BLACK.

Heavy breathing. We hear a girl SCREAM. Disorienting white light FLASHES.

MAN #1 (O.S.)
Mr. Price...

MAN #2 (O.S.)
You're crazy, man.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

POV - the room is incredibly dark. We slowly turn to see a PISTOL looking us directly in the face. Then - a deafeningly loud KNOCK.

INT. PRICE INVESTIGATIONS - NIGHT

DETECTIVE PRICE
AH!

DETECTIVE PRICE quickly lifts his head from his desk. He's surrounded by loose paperwork and empty bottles. Rain patters on the dirty window. Smooth jazz emits softly from the radio.

Catching his breath, Price grabs a cigarette box from his jacket pocket and removes one. He attempts to light it with his fingernail. He fails. Tries again. No dice.

More knocking.

DETECTIVE PRICE (CONT'D)
Alright, alright!

He stands and crosses the small office. Kicks aside another bottle, along with some scattered files and photographs.

He pulls open the creaky door. Out of place in the dingy hallway is a WOMAN - tall, breathtakingly gorgeous. Her eyes are red and puffy, her cheeks flushed - but her stare is cold and composed.

DETECTIVE PRICE (CONT'D)
What's this about then?

WOMAN
Says on your sign you're a private eye.

Her eyes dart around the cramped, untidy office.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Not accustomed to clients?

DETECTIVE PRICE
Not in this weather.

WOMAN
Afraid it's rather urgent. May I
come in?

He steps back. She enters, and pulls a wooden chair to the desk.

He sits. Tears have already welled up in her face. He grabs a handkerchief and hands it over. She dabs her cheeks.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
It's my daughter. She's been
kidnapped.

DETECTIVE PRICE
Kidnapped? Doll, why didn't you go
to the police?

WOMAN
You don't think I've thought of
that? It's complicated.

DETECTIVE PRICE
How so?

WOMAN
My husband. He's chief deputy. He
kidnapped Mary. They won't do
anything. They'll protect him. They
consider it a family matter.

DETECTIVE PRICE
Isn't it?

WOMAN
You're not...understanding me.
(tears stream down her
face)
He's not right. He took my baby
girl. I need you to find her and
bring her back to me. I'll pay any
price, Detective.

He looks at her.

DETECTIVE PRICE
Leads?

WOMAN

His name's Edward. He's changed so much. I know next to nothing about him. Just that he frequents that old club...Spirits and Smoke on 51st. Goes for a round of poker and booze after work.

DETECTIVE PRICE

Photograph?

WOMAN

I don't have one. I'm sorry.

DETECTIVE PRICE

How the Devil do you expect me to track this man down?

The woman holds up her hand, showcasing a silver wristwatch.

WOMAN

His is matching. They're two-of-a-kind. If you find one...it's Ed's.

He nods.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Covered in a black trench coat, Price strolls down the sidewalk through the rain. He cuts a massive, yet fluid figure, casting a looming shadow onto the road.

DETECTIVE PRICE (V.O.)

What a night. Started with jazz and a mule. Now I'm drowning, searching for a faceless creep who owns the fuzz.

He approaches two tall buildings, split by a small alley, leading into darkness.

DETECTIVE PRICE (V.O.)

Not my sorta place. Junkies and bimbos everywhere.

EXT. ALLEY, 51ST - NIGHT

Price walks further down the alleyway, as light from the street fades. A young JUNKIE sits, back up against the brick wall. His hair is disheveled, his clothes stained. His bloodshot eyes flick open. Jumps up.

JUNKIE

Hey...I think I know you.

DETECTIVE PRICE

Unlikely. Beat it, lowlife.

He pushes past the kid, and walks towards a pair of small, black doors on the back wall. He pulls them open. A set of stairs leads downwards.

INT. SPIRITS AND SMOKE - NIGHT

Price looks around. The large, basement room is filled with smoke and intoxicated patrons. He takes out a cigarette and is immediately helped by an employee with a matchbook.

MONTAGE: Price speaks to the bartenders. They shake their heads. Ditto for various customers. Price looks increasingly frustrated. END MONTAGE.

Price speaks with a MAN IN A COWBOY HAT preparing to shoot a cue ball.

DETECTIVE PRICE

You're telling me you've never met this Edward? Not once. And you're here every night?

MAN IN COWBOY HAT

That's right enough. You're not calling me a liar?

DETECTIVE PRICE

Of course not, old boy. Just trying to get the story straight.

(to a waiter)

What's say you find me an Old Fashioned?

(a beat)

Ah!

He's blinded by a quick flash. He locates the source. Peering in through a small window from the above-ground, the JUNKIE watches him. He now wears a SILVER WRISTWATCH, reflecting light from inside the speakeasy.

When the kid locks eyes with Price, he turns and takes off. Price sprints towards the door.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Price races down the sidewalk. Fifty feet ahead, the junkie bumps into an older man, knocking him over.

DETECTIVE PRICE
(approaching old man)
Apologies, old chap.

He helps him up, then takes off.

The junkie is getting slower, tired. Price makes up distance.

Junkie veers into the street, nearly getting HIT BY A CAR - tires SCREECH, horn HONKS. Price crosses, waving an apology to the driver.

Junkie turns into another alley. Price follows.

EXT. RANDOM ALLEY - NIGHT

The junkie nearly runs into a LOCKED GATE, entirely blocking the throughway. He turns around, panting. Faces Price. Puts his hands in the air.

JUNKIE
Okay, then. You a copper?

DETECTIVE PRICE
P.I.

JUNKIE
(flashes a small smile)
Sure. What do you want?

DETECTIVE PRICE
Where'd you get the watch?

The junkie looks down at his wrist.

JUNKIE
Was my mother's.

DETECTIVE PRICE
Sure.

They lock eyes for a long moment. Rain pounds against the pavement. Light from a streetlamp casts their silhouettes against the alley wall.

DETECTIVE PRICE (CONT'D)
Not interested in the watch.
Interested in its owner.

JUNKIE

I'll bite. Big guy. Real official-looking. He comes to me, I sell 'im stuff. Runs outta cash. Trades me his watch. I dunno who he is, I dunno where he is. Only thing I'm guilty of is a little free market capitalism.

DETECTIVE PRICE

How about you tell me what it is you do know or I'll bust whatever operation you have going on here?

JUNKIE

I told you. I'm in the dark.

Price steps closer. His shadow engulfs the smaller man's.

JUNKIE (CONT'D)

Back down, gumshoe. What, this guy's your classic white-collar addict, right? Dying at his desk job by day, living with a little Cadillac by night? Why do you care - fella diggin' himself an early grave?

DETECTIVE PRICE

Something like that.

JUNKIE

Alright, look. You keep away from my business, I'll tell you. But this guy swore me to secrecy, so you better make sure he steers clear, got it?

Detective Price stares. A reluctant agreement.

JUNKIE (CONT'D)

He's a regular. Comes alone. I'll tell you, I was seein' his face four, five times a week. Fella could barely walk. I was about to turn him away. Honest! But this guy's begging. Not enough cash. I tell 'im to hand over the watch. Worth a hell of a lot of dough. He does it, no problem. I figure, maybe he's got more pieces he's willin' to part with. I tell him I'll start comin' to him. Gives me an address. 38 Downing.

(MORE)

JUNKIE (CONT'D)

Guy mumbles that if I tell anyone,
he'll kill me. But you won't let
that happen, will you?

After a beat, Price turns to leave - but the alley entrance
is BLOCKED by two MASSIVE FIGURES.

The junkie looks delighted.

JUNKIE (CONT'D)

Evening, boys! Sorry, detective.
Looks like I won't have to take the
risk after all.

POV - a FIST is thrust towards us.

CUT TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK.

Flashes of a bright light. Glimpses of a winding staircase. A
girl's voice SCREAMS. CRIES.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

POV - slowly looking down. A pistol in hand. A giant window
SHATTERS. Water flows in, first slowly, like rain - then
faster, like a current. The room starts to flood.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER RAPIDS - NIGHT

POV - Price opens his eyes. He's being whipped downstream by
a rapid river.

He paddles his arms wildly, trying desperately to keep
himself from going under. His face is beat to a pulp, barely
recognizable. He yells like a dying animal.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER BANK - NIGHT

Price pulls himself onto the hillside bank. Lays on his back.
The water's washed away the blood. We can clearly see his
black eyes and bruises. He pants. Catches his breath.

His trench coat is gone. He feels his pockets. No wallet. No
cigarettes.

Price struggles to his feet. The rain has stopped - replaced with a thick fog. He limps up the hill.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Price looks around. He's on a quiet suburban street - the river's carried him out of town.

DETECTIVE PRICE (V.O.)
 I guess I should be thanking God
 I'm alive. But I can't help but
 think it was he who led that copper
 to do those things. Who guided that
 dame to my office. Who forced me
 into this mess.

The street is illuminated by a single, shockingly bright streetlight, oscillating on and off at random intervals.

The houses are all dark, except for a single home at the end of the road. Light emanates from the bottom floor window, cutting through the murky air. He begins to stumble down the road.

About halfway to the house, he notices a street sign.

DOWNING STREET.

DETECTIVE PRICE (V.O.)
 Of all the places...

EXT. HOUSE FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

He hobbles to the entryway. The house is the tallest on the block - four stories. Sure enough, a silver sign near the door reads the number **38**.

Price goes to knock but finds the door cracked open, a sliver of light peering through.

DETECTIVE PRICE
 Good evening! Detective Price,
 Price investigations!

Silence. He pushes it open. CREEAK! He enters.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

The light is coming from the kitchen. He peers through the open doorway. His facial injuries already seem to have improved.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The room is empty. Suddenly - a small, scuffling sound, like someone pushing a chair.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Price looks straight ahead. At the end of the short hall, a spiral staircase leads to the upper landings.

He proceeds, slowly. Begins to climb the stairs.

As he climbs, light from the street illuminates the house - before engulfing it in darkness once more.

Price reaches the fourth floor. There's only one room. The door's ajar. Price pushes it open. CREEEEEEAAK!

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The streetlight bathes the dark room with a LOW LIGHT. It's relatively large - we can make out a bed, a desk, and various children's toys. The windows are enormous, stretching from the ceiling to the floor.

On the far wall, the massive SILHOUETTE of a chair is projected - in it, the shadow of a young woman. MARY.

DARKNESS. Price slowly crosses the room. He turns a slight corner. We can barely see the outline of the girl in the chair.

BRIGHT LIGHT. The girl is TIED and GAGGED. She locks eyes with Price. And starts muffled SCREAMING.

She shuffles the chair around, trying desperately to escape. Her screams turn to EXASPERATED CRIES. Her eyes are filled with primal terror.

Confused, Price approaches her. He puts his hands up, non-threatening. She continues to WAIL. He reaches her, and slips off the gag.

MARY
GET AWAYY FROM ME! PLEASE!
PLEASEEE...

She SCREAMS again, tears streaming down her cheeks. The streetlight TURNS OFF.

Suddenly - a window pane SHATTERS! Price jumps back.

CREAAAAAAK. Behind Price, shadows on the wall show a figure entering.

MARY (CONT'D)

HELP ME!

BRIGHT LIGHT! The figure turns the corner - it's the WOMAN. She's holding a pistol. And pointing it right at Price's head.

Price slowly turns around to look at her.

DETECTIVE PRICE

What is this?

(a beat)

Am I a patsy?

The woman starts crying.

WOMAN

Get away from her. Now!

DETECTIVE PRICE

What? Are you insane?!

She starts ABSOLUTELY BALLING. So does the girl.

WOMAN

Edward!

DETECTIVE PRICE

WHAT?!

LIGHT OFF. BANG! The gun FIRES. Price grabs his shoulder. He screams in agony. Then - he STOPS. He looks her directly in the eyes. Something about his demeanor has changed. The woman is shaking badly.

DETECTIVE PRICE (CONT'D)

You missed.

He takes a step towards her. Then another. She wails.

DETECTIVE PRICE (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to try again?

LIGHT ON. He continues to approach her. Mary cries loudly. He reaches the woman. Places his hand on the gun. Takes it from her.

She falls onto the floor, hysterical.

She steadies herself, gets up, and runs to her daughter. She struggles to untie the bonds.

Price slowly steps towards them, clutching his shoulder with one hand, holding the gun in the other. The woman straightens up. She's utterly petrified.

LIGHT OFF. She takes a step back. Price steps forward. She takes two steps back. She keeps backing up, not looking where she's going.

DETECTIVE PRICE (CONT'D)

Wait -

The woman backs out the open window, into the fog - she DROPS OFF THE EDGE.

We hear her body hit the pavement.

The streetlight TURNS ON. Price's face is stunned. He's staring directly at the light - puts his hands up to shield his eyes. It's incredibly BRIGHT. It shuts OFF. Then back ON. Then off again. Then on. Each time it is BRIGHTER and BRIGHTER - but he continues to stare right into it.

Mary bawls behind him. He holds his head in his free hand, as if suffering from a migraine.

POV - He looks down. Sees the pistol.

He lifts it to his temple. Finger on the trigger.

Then - the sound of a GROUP OF PEOPLE POUNDING UP THE STAIRCASE:

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)

MR. PRICE. THIS IS THE POLICE.
WE'RE COMING IN!

Hold on Price. The sound of the door being KICKED OPEN. Mary weeping.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

DROP YOUR WEAPON!

The streetlight blinks FASTER and FASTER. BANG! Price DROPS the gun. It CLATTERS to the floor.

He continues to stare into the light. It gets brighter and brighter. More sterile, serene. He opens his eyes.

INT. PATIENT ROOM, PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - DAY

POV - Price blinks, adjusting to the light. It's coming from an intense, fluorescent ceiling fixture. Smooth jazz plays from an overhead speaker. A door creaks open.

Price is laying in a hospital bed. He shuts his eyes. A DOCTOR enters, along with a younger man - an INTERN.

DOCTOR

You may have heard of this one. The infamous Edward Price. No? He used to be Chief of Police for the City of New York. Was a stand-up guy, I'm told. Tragic story. Became a drug addict - affected his brain. He kidnapped his daughter.

INTERN

Kidnapped?

DOCTOR

Yep. Took her to a secret house, tied her up, whole thing. Cops tracked him down. Sent his wife up first to calm him. Stupid move. He pushed her out the fourth story window. Well - pushed her, or she fell. Jury had a time of it, debating that one.

INTERN

Seriously?

DOCTOR

Oh, yeah. Defense argued family dispute. Accidental death. Not guilty. They won, eventually. State still shipped him off here though. These days he's barely conscious. Non-conversational. Who knows what's going on inside that head?

The doctor chuckles. He turns to leave. The intern follows, clearly uncomfortable.

Price opens his eyes. He looks up at the far wall.

Reverse shot - a small, old TV hangs in the corner.

On it, plays a black and white noir film from the 1930s. A DETECTIVE sits at a desk in his cramped office. Takes out a cigarette. Lights it with his nail.

FADE OUT.