

SIREN

By Andrew Mandapat

FADE IN

INT. BAR -- NIGHT

A bleeding man on a chair stares straight ahead.

Next to him, a woman's corpse.

No one else around.

A radio plays AULD LANG SYNE in the background.

NED (V.O.)

I did something wrong. Once.

NED, an ordinary sort with a common face, slumps in his chair.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I never wondered when my turn would be to kick the bucket, how and when it would happen. I don't like dwelling on morbid things.

He nods his head, his eyes fight to stay open.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

About the dead woman next to me, we'll get to her. Who knew?

Ned exhales his last breath.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I've heard said that there's a million stories in the naked city. Mine isn't much to tell, but you're going to hear it anyway. I got no place else to go.

INT. PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

Ned goes over a stack of pictures. Each snapshot he sees belts him in the gut. He pushes back sobs as he reviews the photographs.

NED (V.O.)

This all starts at Kaneworth's office. Nice place if you don't mind the smell of cheap cologne and expensive smoke.

KANESWORTH, a sleek man dressed in smart clothing, sports a confident smirk.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I always had a thing for naughty pictures, only they ain't so naughty when they're pictures of my gal and another fella who isn't me.

Ned sees one that especially hurts him.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Especially when that other fella is that spineless bastard Jones. Someone I answer to eight hours a day, five days a week.

He muffles a groan, crumples the picture, drops the rest of the stack on the floor, and loosens his tie.

Kaneworth takes out a bottle of whiskey. He pours Ned a shot.

KANESWORTH

Take it easy Ned. A couple of slugs of these'll give you vision, see that woman for what she really is.

Ned slams the first shot.

NED

What's that supposed to mean?

Kaneworth pours him another shot.

KANESWORTH

No offense meant buddy. This isn't exactly my favorite part of the job. Show you smut pictures starring your girl.

Ned takes another straight swig and slams the shot glass back on the desk.

NED

That's enough of that talk.

Kaneworth smooths his tie and leans back on his chair.

KANESWORTH

Well now you know Ned. I figure it's opportunity, new leaf, brand new day.

Ned pours himself a drink, guzzles it down, then stands up.

NED

Man in the pictures is my boss.

KANESWORTH

Hope you get a promotion soon.

Kanesworth pours Ned another shot.

KANESWORTH (CONT'D)

Well Ned, there's the matter of the rest of my fees.

Ned takes the drink, grabs a couple of weathered bills from his breast pocket, and throws them on Kanesworth's desk.

KANESWORTH (CONT'D)

What's that?

NED

Rest of your fees Mr. Kanesworth.

Kanesworth gives the money a quick glance.

KANESWORTH

That some sort of joke? If it is, I'm all outta laughs.

NED

That's the last of my payments, as previously arranged.

KANESWORTH

Says who?

NED

Says us.

KANESWORTH

Says nothin'. I snoop around for a week, waste my time, prove your woman's a whore, and you spit on my face?

Kanesworth picks the bills off his desk, crumples them, and throws them back at Ned.

He walks from behind his desk towards Ned.

KANESWORTH (CONT'D)

One thing you don't do is piss on a man in his place of business and expect to walk out.

Kanesworth plants his finger on Ned's chest.

KANESWORTH (CONT'D)

The day doesn't end without you paying me what you owe, or maybe I take my payments in trade from Mrs. hanky-panky.

Kanesworth's face is an inch away from Ned's.

KANESWORTH (CONT'D)

Loser like you can't keep his woman happy, so you spread your desperate filth to the likes of me.

NED

Shut your mouth.

Kanesworth grabs Ned by the throat and chokes him. Ned tries to break away, but Kanesworth's strength erupts from surprising hate.

KANESWORTH

I kill a sonofabitch like you, no one notices. I do the world a favor.

Ned takes the whiskey bottle from the desk and smashes it into Kanesworth's head.

Kanesworth staggers backwards as he reaches for a gun in his side holster.

Ned grabs a paperweight and strikes Kanesworth on the side of the head.

NED

Enough!

Kanesworth drops to the floor.

Ned grabs the gun from Kanesworth's hand.

In silhouette, Ned bludgeons Kanesworth over and over.

INT. HALLWAY -- DAY

A beleaguered Ned trudges onwards.

NED (V.O.)

I'm not one to put my moods into some woman's hands, that would be downright foolish.

He walks towards a door.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

There's exceptions. Who am I to be different?

He stops for a moment.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I have a woman I'm crazy about. Her name's Charlie.

Ned fixes his gaze on the door a few feet away.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

When she first met me she thought I was a catch. Only there was a catch, I wasn't rich. We were gonna fix that. How? I work in a bank. As good a place as any to waste your life. One god-forsaken second at a time.

After a few steps, he stops.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The bank I work in is a lot like other banks. It's got cash inside, some of which I planned to take. All for my sweetheart Charlie.

The door at the end of the hallway opens.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Then I heard her. I mean I "heard" her before I even heard her.

CHARLIE stands in the doorway with the confidence of a hungry snake. She sets her magnetic gaze on Ned.

CHARLIE

What do you make of the way I'm lookin' at you?

NED

Like you know why I came here lookin' for you, lookin' the way I do.

CHARLIE

Like you have something to tell me.

NED

Like you got something to spill.

CHARLIE

Like I'm gonna come clean with something?

NED

Like you have something to say that'll break my heart.

CHARLIE

Like, "Honey, I've been cheating on you with your boss?"

NED

Like that.

CHARLIE

Honey, I've been cheating on you with your boss.

Charlie lights a cigarette.

Ned watches her exhale smoke.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I did it for us, you understand? To help you.

NED

Don't do me any more favors.

CHARLIE

Wasn't like there wasn't purpose behind it. Tell you the truth, it was a waste of time.

She takes another drag from her cigarette.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Some of the time.

NED

You make me nuts.

He advances towards her.

CHARLIE

Jones was gonna get us the hundred grand sweetie. He didn't mind splitting it in two.

Ned stands face to face with Charlie. She places a hand on his neck.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Only he didn't figure he wasn't one of the two.

NED

Shut up Charlie.

Charlie caresses his neck.

CHARLIE

I did it for us, see? So you didn't have to go in there and steal from the bank. Let him do it instead. Make Jones the fall guy.

Ned places a hand on Charlie's neck.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I was gonna have him help us. Use him to get the money then leave him. I was going to tell you all about it.

NED

When was that gonna be?

CHARLIE

As soon as he fell for it. If you knew about my plan ahead of time, you'd act funny and goof it all up.

NED

You have a pretty neck, even with that cheap necklace.

CHARLIE

You gave it to me for Christmas.

NED

Mustn't have been much of a Christmas

CHARLIE

I hate you Ned.

NED

I hate you too Charlie.

They both kiss.

INT. ROOM -- DAY

Ned empties the contents of a miniature bottle of whiskey into his coffee. He takes a sip.

NED

Let's do it.

Behind him, Charlie readjusts her blouse, a new cigarette in her mouth.

NED (CONT'D)

Just stop talkin' about it and do it.

Charlie smiles.

NED (CONT'D)

Answer me a question. Why didn't Jones fall for your plan?

She takes a deep drag from her cigarette. Ned waits.

CHARLIE

He got wise.

NED

Dim bulb like that doesn't get wise.

CHARLIE

We'll take care of him honey.

NED

How?

CHARLIE

How do people like us end up taking care of people like him ?

Charlie taps some ashes off her cigarette.

NED

Don't tell me anymore.

CHARLIE

Good, because I don't want you telling me anything about how that blood stain got on the edge of your sleeve.

NED

Nosebleed.

Charlie winks at Ned as she inhales more smoke.

NED (CONT'D)

Tomorrow night, we walk into the bank, we walk out the both of us a hundred thousand dollars smarter.

Charlie stubs out her cigarette.

CHARLIE

You forgot one little detail darling.

NED

What's that?

CHARLIE

You're gonna have to tell your wife
about us.

INT. BAR -- EVENING

SONORA, made up like an actress on a movie poster, sings a song (MISTER SANDMAN or ON THE SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET) to a sparse crowd of onlookers in the smoky room.

NED (V.O.)

Oh yeah, forgot about her, Sonora.

She emits a breezy glow.

From a table up close, Ned watches transfixed.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The wife.

She sings most of the song to him. They don't take their eyes off each other.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) Sonora wears a different outfit; a different night. She performs in front of another small crowd.

Ned watches, not sitting as close as before, still a connection between the two.

B) Ned watches Sonora sing from a few tables away. He distractedly nurses his drink.

Sonora doesn't give him as much eye contact, neither does he.

C) Ned sits considerably farther away from the songstress. He isn't even watching her.

D) Sonora continues to belt out her song. She sings to an audience of none.

A few tables in front of her sits an untended drink with an ashtray holding a lit; unfinished cigarette. A one dollar bill lays next to it.

EXT. CITY STREETS -- EVENING

Ned picks a dollar bill off the ground and shoves it in his pocket.

NED (V.O.)

Well we did it. We took the money.
Walked in and walked out. Nuthin'
to it, I guess. Maybe a touch too
much like we planned.

Ned trudges on, he produces a flask, weight of the world on
his shoulders.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Well there was a glitch or two, can't
help that. Made me turn to the Bible
afterwards. Once you get past the
part where they tell you who's related
to who, there's some pretty good
stuff in there.

He takes a drink.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I looked up the part with the ten
commandments. I've been breaking
some of them lately. The real big
ones too.

Ned takes another drink and plods along.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Wasn't time for me to be home yet,
but I worry. I worry that Sonora
will louse this up. If I don't watch
it, Charlie will--

Ned turns his walk into a trot.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Jesus H. Johnson. Charlie! I gotta
really start keeping my eye on her.

INT. ROOM (NED AND SONORA'S STUDIO)

The radio plays.

Sonora packs a suitcase which sits on top of a bed.

Charlie appears behind her, holding a gun. She points it at
Sonora.

Sonora doesn't notice.

Charlie aims.

INT. HALLWAY (NED AND SONORA'S STUDIO)

Ned hustles towards the door.

He looks around before he carefully takes out his pistol.

INT. ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

A beat before Charlie gets ready to pull the trigger, Sonora straightens up. She turns off the radio.

Charlie slithers out of sight before Sonora turns around.

Sonora scans the room for a moment then returns to packing.

Charlie reappears and watches Sonora.

INT. HALLWAY

Ned with his gun in hand presses his ear against the door.

He hears footsteps. Ned places his hand on the doorknob.

INT. ROOM

Charlie sees the doorknob turn and runs for the closet.

Sonora turns around and sees Ned swing the door open. He aims the gun at her.

Sonora steps backwards.

Ned lowers his gun.

NED

I'm sorry sweetie, I thought I heard
an intruder.

SONORA

You were gonna shoot me.

NED

I thought you were someone else.

SONORA

Put that gun away.

A few steps away, from the corner of his vision, he sees the closet door slightly ajar.

Charlie and Ned make eye contact.

She puts a finger to her lip with a quiet "shhh".

Ned hesitates.

SONORA (CONT'D)

I said put that away!

He complies while Sonora collects herself.

SONORA (CONT'D)

I heard on the radio about a bank robbery.

Ned shuts the door.

SONORA (CONT'D)

In your bank.

He walks to the window, glances out, and draws the blinds.

NED

You don't say.

SONORA

Mr. Jones was shot and killed.

NED

That's a shame.

SONORA

Any ideas on who could've shot him?

NED

Someone with a gun.

SONORA

They said it was a man and a woman.

NED

Who killed him?

SONORA

A man and a woman.

NED

I thought a man and a woman robbed the bank.

SONORA

They did.

NED

Who killed Jones?

SONORA

A man and a woman.

NED

That's some couple.

Sonora fishes her pockets and produces a wad of money.

NED (CONT'D)

Where'd that come from?

SONORA

I'm hoping not from that bank.

NED

Where'd you find it?

SONORA

I saw a bag of cash in the oven

NED

You never were much of a cook.

Sonora heaves the cash at Ned. He catches it.

SONORA

Stop it! I knew we were hurting for money. It's tough I know, but we were making ends meet. I could find another job singin'.

Ned inspects the money and looks at Sonora.

NED

Look me in the eye and ask me what you want to ask me.

SONORA

I'm scared for you Ned. I'm trying not to be scared for me. Should I be?

Ned takes Sonora and holds her head in his hands.

NED

Sonora, ask me. This is the only time you get to ask without you hurting my feelings.

They hold each other's gaze.

After a long beat, Sonora pulls away and moves backward towards the doorway.

NED (CONT'D)

You just broke my heart sweetheart.

SONORA

You've broken mine for the last time.

Ned takes a step towards her.

SONORA (CONT'D)

Don't take another step.

He takes another step.

SONORA (CONT'D)

Please. You take another step and I ask you about the woman.

Ned stops. Charlie's eyes widen from inside the closet.

NED

Woman?

SONORA

The radio. The radio said it was a man and a woman, and if I ever meet her, I'll tell her she deserves you.

NED

There is no other woman.

Sonora stands at the doorway.

SONORA

You walk down a road and fall in a ditch, it's an accident. Next day you walk down the same road and fall in the same ditch, it's a pattern. You walk down that same road a third time and fall in that same ditch again, now that's just being stupid. I'm through being stupid.

Ned walks towards her.

SONORA (CONT'D)

G'bye Ned.

She leaves the room.

A moment passes and Charlie creeps out from behind the closet door.

Ned doesn't even glance her way.

NED

How long you been in there?

CHARLIE

Long enough. We're not getting too far with her in the picture.

NED

What're we gonna do about it?

CHARLIE

We aren't going to do anything about it. You are.

Ned looks at her.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Don't look at me like that.

She twirls her gun.

NED

Where'd you get the bright idea to stash the money here?

CHARLIE

From you. You told me she wasn't going to be home today. You told me she was going to be at that bar singing those pretty little songs of hers. I stepped into the kitchen to grab a drink then I heard her walk in so I threw the bag in the oven.

Ned shoves Charlie's gun away.

NED

Always thinkin' huh?

CHARLIE

Then she starts packin' her suitcase, turns on the radio, listens to the news and starts goin' crazy. I tell ya, if she hadn't answered the phone, we would've been cooked for sure.

NED

How come I ain't so sure you would have been cooked?

CHARLIE

I was about to do something drastic before you stepped in.

NED

I called to make sure she wasn't home.

CHARLIE

See? I told you it was your idea to stash the loot in here.

NED

There was no idea to stash it here. Will you just shut up for once? I need to think.

CHARLIE

What's the big idea?

NED

There is no big idea.

He drops to a chair and loosens his tie.

CHARLIE

I have an idea.

Ned searches his pockets for a cigarette. He's all out.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Listen, we'll make it painless, use poison. Put her to sleep, do her in civilized like, because you two have a history.

Ned glares at her.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I didn't see you making any funny faces when it came time to shoot Jones.

She blows the top of her pistol and winks at Ned.

He slumps back in the chair with a look of resignation.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Baby, we said if we go in on this we go all the way. No weakness.

NED

No weakness.

CHARLIE

She work at that bar tonight?

Ned nods his head.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Give her a visit once it closes. Make like you want to have a talk. Come clean about you and me. It's simple really, all you have to say is...

INT. BAR -- EVENING

Sonora and Ned sit at a table, the only people in the dimly lit place. Both have drinks in front of them.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

"Honey let's you and me make up. There's a way out of this..."

Most of the tables have chairs placed upside down. The open sign turned around.

NED

There's a way out of this jam and it starts with me telling the truth.

Sonora pays him strict attention.

NED (CONT'D)
 Truth is I love you.

She toys with her drink, intent on Ned's words.

NED (CONT'D)
 You say you want the truth, and that's
 the best truth I can give you.
 Everything else is just talk. The
 money, I took it. Jones, I didn't
 kill. This other woman you keep
 dreaming up? There is no other woman,
 just you.

Sonora doesn't reply. She searches Ned's face.

NED (CONT'D)
 You haven't touched your drink. Say
 something.

Ned raises his glass. Sonora hesitates to raise hers.

NED (CONT'D)
 Here's to us.

Sonora reluctantly toasts and they both drink. She makes a
 face.

NED (CONT'D)
 Whatsa matter?

SONORA
 Nothing.

She looks uncomfortable.

NED
 Now about the money, I figure we--

SONORA
 Let's not talk about it.

NED
 You ok?

SONORA
 I'm fine.

NED
 You sure?

SONORA
 I just feel weak all of a sudden.

NED
 All right we'll stop the money talk.
 Drink again, might be a cure for
 what ails ya.

Sonora takes another drink. She abruptly drops her glass and grabs her throat.

Ned looks on and takes a drink to calm his own nerves.

Sonora gets up and sways a bit. She gasps for air and collapses on the floor.

She twitches a little and stops.

Ned takes another sip of his drink as he stares at Sonora's body.

After a moment, he takes out a gun and sets it on his lap. He downs the rest of his drink.

Charlie enters the room carrying the large duffel bag. Ned's back faces her. He doesn't turn to acknowledge her.

Charlie has a gun aimed at Ned.

CHARLIE

Is she dead?

NED

Looks that way, and pretty soon you'll be-

Ned turns around with his gun in hand to see Charlie pointing a bigger gun at him.

CHARLIE

Joining her?

NED

You can put that away now sweetie, she's no longer any threat to us.

CHARLIE

You see me pointing this piece at her? It's pointed where it's pointed.

NED

It's pointed right at my heart.

CHARLIE

Actually your head.

NED

Who do you think's a quicker shot?

CHARLIE

We'll find out in a second won't we?

NED

You think I hadn't had this worked out already?

(MORE)

NED (CONT'D)

You think I'm some sort of sap that
I didn't figure you had an angle?

Sonora picks herself off the floor. She holds a gun out of
Ned's vision.

NED (CONT'D)

Even before Kanesworth showed me
those pretty snapshots of you and
Jones, I made my mind up. You and
the songbird dead.

Charlie and Sonora smile at each other from across the room.

CHARLIE

And you walk away with the loot.

NED

That's how the story ends beautiful.

CHARLIE

How you holdin' up cutie pie?

NED

Holdin' up fine baby.

SONORA

She wasn't talking to you.

Ned freezes.

SONORA (CONT'D)

I'm peachy dollface.

CHARLIE

My God Sonora, you're a beautiful
work of art.

SONORA

Like a million dollar painting.

NED (V.O.)

Lots of things go through your mind
when you get the shaft. The first
thing is to--

Ned turns to shoot Sonora. Sonora plugs him.

NED (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Arrrrrgggghhhh!

As he reels backwards, Charlie shoots him in the back.

Ned pinballs amongst some furniture, drops his gun, and falls
to the ground.

Both women lower their pistols. They share a look of contentment.

CHARLIE
I missed you so much.

Charlie rushes towards Sonora. Sonora raises her hand to stop her.

SONORA
Money's all in there?

CHARLIE
Every little penny.

SONORA
Stay where you are.

CHARLIE
Why?

SONORA
Do you really love me?

CHARLIE
My God Sonora, what kinda question is that?

SONORA
Simple one. You love me?

CHARLIE
'Course I do.

SONORA
Know what love is? It's that funny feeling you get in your heart that turns into knots in your stomach. It makes you giddy for a short while. Mostly it makes you stupid and careless. After that, it just clouds your judgment, makes you do silly things like weep at sad songs.

Sonora cocks her head sideways as if to listen for any sounds.

CHARLIE
What's the matter baby?

SONORA
I don't hear any sad songs and you're crying. Lady, you got it bad.

CHARLIE
Sweetheart you're acting funny.

SONORA
Come closer.

Charlie walks towards Sonora, arms wide open. Sonora advances towards her. They meet face to face.

A pause between the two.

Gunshot.

A look.

Charlie drops the bag of money.

Gunshot.

Charlie drops her gun. She leans her head on Sonora's shoulder.

SONORA (CONT'D)

Don't love me Charlie, ain't much
future in it.

Charlie attempts to whisper into Sonora's ear, but sighs her last breath instead.

Charlie collapses to the ground.

After a silent moment, Sonora hears Ned giggle. He drags his body towards Sonora and props himself up on a chair.

NED

Gimme a drink will ya?

Sonora trains her pistol on Ned.

NED (CONT'D)

She forgot to tell you something.

Sonora picks the bag off the floor, looks inside, and smiles.

NED (CONT'D)

That's how you beat 'em Sonora.
Starts with that smile 'a yours.
Had me fooled. Heck, had poor Charlie
fooled too, I guess.

SONORA

What'll you have to drink?

She walks behind the bar.

NED

Whiskey. Double would be nice.

She pours him a shot.

NED (CONT'D)

Might as well spend all of that money
here, 'cause you aren't getting too

(MORE)

NED (CONT'D)
 far. What with you about to die of
 poisoning and all.

Sonora brings him the shot of whiskey. Ned takes a gulp and drops the glass. He doesn't have long.

NED (CONT'D)
 That was real poison in your drink
 Sonora. Charlie was playin' both of
 us for chumps.

SONORA
 She'd never poison me.

Sonora leans into Ned and kisses his cheek.

SONORA (CONT'D)
 She loved me.

NED
 This isn't fair.

SONORA
 Fair's what the weather's like in
 the spring.

NED
 We had some fun times didn't we?

SONORA
 I'll try and remind myself.

Sonora turns to leave, takes a few steps, and turns around.
 She takes out a bill from the bag and drops it on Ned's lap.

SONORA (CONT'D)
 For the fun times.

She turns around and walks out the door.

NED (V.O.)
 This is where we met folks. Not
 much left of the story to tell. I
 guess you have the ending all figured
 out. Hell of a yarn though.

EXT. BAR -- NIGHT

Soundtrack plays either NON JE NE REGRETTE RIEN or LA VIE EN ROSE.

Sonora carries the bag as she walks on with assured steps.

A few feet later, she drops the bag. Her arms tremble. Her legs wobble.

She tries to grab the bag, but her body threatens to fall.
Sonora clutches her chest.

She tumbles to the pavement.

Her body lays sprawled next to the bag of money.

The moonlight shines on her corpse.

FADE OUT