

HEARTBREAKER

by

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CAST

FEMME FATALE - She's just as her name suggests, a classic film noir lady with a soft spot for all the wrong guys. She is always, ALWAYS, covered in shadows cast by Venetian blinds. That's just how she be. If she were in a basement with no windows she'd be covered in shadows cast by Venetian blinds.

PRIVATE DICK - A Wisconsin-born and bred P.I. He has no idea what film noir is. He is an irony-free zone, a fellow who lives his entire life bathed in sunshine and whole milk. He is earnest and upstanding and is prone to the frequent use of the phrase "Ya' know..."

HOWIE - A sexy, sexy beast. A heart breaker. A pit bull.

VELMA - A Russian pussy. Cat. A pussycat.

TIME

Now. Also, the eternal film noir present.

PLACE

Stapler, Minnesota

NOTES: All the characters face and address the audience directly for the duration of the play and each character occupies their own section of the stage. Characters can stand, for example, or sit on high stools. As each character speaks, they are lit by a spot. When they finish, the spot goes dark and comes up on the next speaker. The dialogue of one character should start IMMEDIATELY after the former character's dialogue ends. These transitions should be seamless.

The **PRIVATE DICK**'s dialogue includes overall narration for the piece as well as his own dialogue.

No elaborate costuming should be employed to make **HOWIE** look like a dog or **VELMA** look like a cat. At most, the costume should just be a plastic dog/cat nose with whiskers that attaches around the head with an elastic band.

*At rise: A dark stage. Dramatic strains of some cinematic noir music swell and then die down. Spotlight up on **FEMME FATALE**.*

FEMME FATALE

(Takes a drag of a cigarette and blows the smoke out towards the audience)

I suppose you want me to start at the beginning.

(Takes another drag)

I suppose you want me to spill the beans, sing like a canary, let the cat outta the bag--

(Another drag)

I suppose that's what you say to all the dames who come here, all decked out in their glad rags looking for some sort of relief from whatever is gnawing at their guts, whatever keeps them up at night.

*Simultaneous blackout on **FEMME FATALE** and spot up on **PRIVATE DICK**. This pattern continues throughout.*

PRIVATE DICK

I'll tell ya' the God's honest truth. I had no idea what the heck she was talking about. It was all very dramatic--like metaphor, metaphor, metaphor, ya' know? Very vague and symbolic. She was a nice enough lady--and she was certainly *dressed* nice enough. In fact she was dressed pretty fancy. Most o' the gals 'round here shop at the QVC cuz, ya know, it's convenient and a good value. This one was different though. And it wasn't just the clothes.

FEMME FATALE

OK. I get it. Don't get rough. Ya don't have to force me to say it. I'll say it!

PRIVATE DICK

(Totally defensive, he wasn't doing a thing)

Force her? I was just standing there taking notes in a steno pad.

FEMME FATALE

OK. I'll bite. That's me. Up and down the pike. That's what I'm here for. Relief. From this fear, this dread, this terrible, terrible burden that--

(Dramatically turns her head away)

--that I just gotta share.

PRIVATE DICK

I was having a really hard time tracking her narrative, ya know? I'm wasn't sure what she wanted. Most of the gals who come to me are looking for a lost relative, or they're worried their husband isn't really out at--

(air quotes)

--bowling night. But, truth be told, Stapler, Minnesota is a pretty tame little hamlet. Our town motto is, "Come to Stapler. We'll hold you together so tight you'll never come undone."

(Considers the motto for a moment)

Yeah, there were some pretty heated city council meetings when we came up with that one. Lotsa folks thought it was too racy. But Tommy Carlsson--he owns two used car dealerships out on Highway J and is kind of a big deal in these parts--he liked it and pushed it through.

(Beat)

Anyhoo, nine times outta ten it just so happens the aforementioned husband *IS* at his bowling night and, ya know, everything just goes back to normal. No harm done. But this gal, there was something about her. I said to her, "Miss, you mind me askin, are you from around these parts?" And she says--

FEMME FATALE

Me? I'm from a nasty little dirt patch full o' clip joints and bindle punks. It's the opposite of Easy Street, just past Hard Knock Ave and kitty corner to Jinx Way.

(MORE)

FEMME FATALE (CONT'D)

Soon as I could I fired up the flivver and crushed outta there faster than a greaser dusting a clean sneak on the buttons.

PRIVATE DICK

Sounded like she was from around Duluth.

FEMME FATALE

But the reason I'm here--

PRIVATE DICK

Finally!

FEMME FATALE

There's this cat. Bit of a Bruno, see what I'm sayin'? He's not the nicest fella in the world. But I've never been much for nice fellas--

PRIVATE DICK

Oh and I forgot to mention, here's the really weird part--she was *always* covered in shadows that looked like they were cast by venetian blinds. And I don't even HAVE venetian blinds in my office! Not a one. My Aunt Betty sewed up these really nice window treatments in this pale yellow gingham fabric. But these shadows--they were *always* there! Even when she moved. They moved with her. It was, ya know, kinda, well, I guess unusual is the right word.

FEMME FATALE

What I'm saying is I like my guys a little mean, a little rough around the edges. You get me? I'm not the first girl to feel that way. 'Suppose I won't be the last. I mean, love's not love unless it hurts a little, right?

PRIVATE DICK

And then she starts talking about liking mean guys, and I wanted to say, "Miss, I know we just met and I'm not trying to talk outta turn here. I abide by the code of ethics of Private Investigators League of America.

(MORE)

PRIVATE DICK (CONT'D)

But as a gentleman, a concerned citizen, and a former Eagle Scout I'd like to encourage you to only keep company with men who are kind and chivalrous. My father--God rest his soul--used to tell my sister something when we all lived on the dairy farm in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. He'd say, "Mary Kate, watch how a man treats his dog. If he is unkind to a dog he is certainly not gonna be kind to a lady. And the same goes for holsteins, horses, cats, and house rabbits." Mean people--pardon my French--are just *stinkers*. So I tell her this and she says--

FEMME FATALE

Funny that you should mention dogs.

PRIVATE DICK

"Why's that?" I said. Then she says--

-

FEMME FATALE

Cuz the mean little man I'm talking about, well, he's a pit bull named Howie.

PRIVATE DICK

Pardon me?

HOWIE

Hey.

*(Lights up a cigarette,
takes a long drag,
looking pretty sexy)*

I'm Howie

PRIVATE DICK

And I said, Ma'am, just so we're clear: You are dating a pit bull? And that pit bull is named Howie. Is that what you're telling me? And she said--

FEMME FATALE

Of course we're not dating, not in the strictest sense. I'm not French, if that's what you're suggesting.

HOWIE

Gotta love the French.

PRIVATE DICK

So, 1) I was NOT suggesting that
and 2) Who knew the French
were...well, so...liberal? And
then she said--

FEMME FATALE

But I'm not gonna lie. I got it bad
for that nasty little mutt. And
he's killing me I tell you, HE'S
KILLING ME!

*(FEMME FATALE drama swoons
in the worst possible
way)*

HOWIE

I have that effect on women.

PRIVATE DICK

I asked her to calm down. No need
to get your bowels in an uproar, am
I correct? And she says--

FEMME FATALE

How can I calm down when the little
man I love so much is out every
night doing God knows what, coming
home at all hours with supermarket
kibble and random human leg on his
breath. I'm telling you I'm
desperate!

*(A repeat--possibly bigger--
of the drama swoons
above)*

HOWIE

*(Long drag from a
cigarette)*

Gotta love supermarket kibble.

PRIVATE DICK

So I said, Ma'am, really, I think
you'd feel better if you put that
cigarette out and had a nice cold
glass of milk. I've got a little
mini-fridge in the back room and a
plate of brownies. Aunt Betty made
them, the same one who made those
curtains over there, and, wow, they
are decadent. The brownies.

(MORE)

PRIVATE DICK (CONT'D)

Not the curtains. Loads and loads of butter.

FEMME FATALE

Don't be a bunny! Women don't eat! I live on a diet of half-smoked butts, eel juice, and the shadows cast by venetian blinds.

PRIVATE DICK

Well, at least that cleared up the whole thing with the venetian blinds--I mean, sort of. I could tell that this was not the time for a lifestyle intervention. She was really fixated on that dog. She said--

FEMME FATALE

Can you tail him? Find out what he's up to? I don't have a boatload of cabbage but I'll give you every thing I've got.

PRIVATE DICK

I said, Well, I can imagine that your household revenue streams are limited given that your significant other is--

FEMME FATALE

--a dog?

PRIVATE DICK

--a dog.

HOWIE

Don't judge me. Financially speaking.

PRIVATE DICK

I'm sure we can work something out. I always build a little padding into my budget to account for pro bono work.

FEMME FATALE

Pro bono? Is that that sleazy little scatter down on Mulholland with the broken jukebox? Bartender's got a Maltese Falcon for a left arm? Jeez, that cat gives me a bad case of the Chinese typewriters.

PRIVATE DICK

Chinese typewriters???? Is that a *thing*? So I say, "No, Pro Bono just means that I'll work for free."

FEMME FATALE

Geez, you're a swell guy and a wise head to boot. I bet your mama put you under the broiler on high when you were born.

PRIVATE DICK

Again, not a word. And it actually sounds a little creepy if you ask me. *(Beat)* So I get all the particulars and tell her to go home and wait for my call. I get in my Pontiac Vibe--Tommy Carlsson gave me a sweet deal on it--and I head to the most obvious place--the dog park.

(Sound of dogs barking and playing at the dog park)

But soon it became clear there was no Howie to be found. A passel of Corgis, a skittish Weimaraner, and a couple of goofy mixed breeds tussling over a branch. But no Howie. Now pride myself on keeping clients apprised of my progress, so I called her.

(As if speaking into a phone)

Hello?

FEMME FATALE

(Frantically yelling into the phone as if she can't hear)

Hello! Hello!!!

PRIVATE DICK

Is this Howie's...(beat)...person? I can barely hear you!

FEMME FATALE

Hello!

PRIVATE DICK

What cell plan are you on?

FEMME FATALE

What? You rang me up on the Ameche. What's a cell?

PRIVATE DICK

Aw Jeez. I figure this gal's probably got Cricket wireless. So I tell her I'm at the dog park and she says--

FEMME FATALE

Dog park? What the heck is that? Try the track. He loves the bangtails.

PRIVATE DICK

So I go the track and all I find are ponies.

FEMME FATALE

Try the gin joints. He loves to dip his bill.

PRIVATE DICK

So I check the bars and all I find are drunks.

FEMME FATAL

Try the cat house. He loves the chippies.

PRIVATE DICK

So I check the whorehouse and all I...wait, there is a *whorehouse* in Stapler! I gotta contact social services.

(Takes his phone out to call)

FEMME FATALE

And don't forget that opium den over on 4th. He loves to kick the gong around.

PRIVATE DICK

Opium den??!!! OK, seriously??? So I'm leaving the opium den--I make a note to call social services AGAIN--and, just outta the corner of my eye I catch a glimpse of this stocky little pup turning the corner--

HOWIE

Don't body shame me. I'm very comfortable with my size thank you very much.

PRIVATE DICK

And he's on the move, down fourth, cutting over to Sheboygan, jiggling and jaggling along that commuter bike path they just built near the Conestoga highway. He stops when he gets to this quiet Cul de Sac tucked away from it all--sunny, birds singing, mailboxes with the little flags, pies cooling on the window sill. He trots over to this yellow Cape Cod and along the side of the house all the way to the back. I keep my distance and find a spot where I can hide outta sight, right near this lovely Japanese maple. Seriously, this house has some really lovely landscaping. He's in the back yard, on this huge patio. If the America dream were a backyard patio, it would look just like this. Teak table with a big umbrella, Adirondak chairs, barbecue grill--the nice metal ones they sell at the Costco--and then, way over on the side, a tiny strip of concrete with two forked sticks. Took me a second, then I realized. A shuffleboard court. And laying out on top of that concrete, baking and luxuriating in the noonday sun is the biggest, furriest Russian blue cat I've ever seen. She was exquisite.

VELMA

It's true. No point in being modest.

PRIVATE DICK

Her beauty was hypnotizing.

VELMA

I'm quite the tomato. (beat) So I've been told.

PRIVATE DICK

So hypnotizing that I didn't notice Howie and then--boom!--there he was, right in my face.

HOWIE

What up with you? You got a beef with me?

PRIVATE DICK

What was I gonna say? He made me. The jig was up. I had to come clean. Plus he was kind of irresistible too.

HOWIE

It's true. No point in being modest.

PRIVATE DICK

He had this little mark on the top of his head in the shape of a heart. It was positively adorbs! I just wanted to smush his face between my hands and--

(Gestures as if he's pinching HOWIE'S cheeks and rubbing his face like a Jewish grandma)

HOWIE

Whoa Whoa Whoa watch it bud! If you lean queer that's your biz, but me I like my twists. You touch me one more time and you're gonna be wearing a wooden kimono.

PRIVATE DICK

Oh, first of all, that was bit homophobic. Secondly, wooden kimono? What is with you people and your casual anti-Asian racism?

PRIVATE DICK

I know I had to call her, she had to see for herself. So I did, I said, You gotta get down here, there's something you gotta see. She said--

FEMME FATALE

Let me pin my diapers on and then we're eggs in the coffee.

PRIVATE DICK

Beg pardon?

FEMME FATALE

We're jake.

PRIVATE DICK

Still nothin'

FEMME FATALE

Just let me get dressed. OK? *(Beat)*
Jeez.

PRIVATE DICK

Roger that. *(beat)* She's down there in no time. I take her to where Howie and Velma are. Velma's laying on her back, warming her belly in the noon sun. Howie's on an inflatable raft--the kind with the little palm tree--not a care in the world. He gets out of the pool, dries off and that's when it happens. They do it. *(beat)* By which I mean--they start playing shuffleboard. The least ironic of all seaside games. Theirs was a love so pure, so certain and complete that they could waste time with a frivolous game. Something with no purpose, no desire or intent. Because all that mattered was that they were together while they did it. I looked over at my client just in time to see a single tear fall down her face. I couldn't believe she could produce any moisture given that she never hydrates. But there it was. And I know, as certain as the day is long, that her heart was broken. And she knew she had to let him go. He was happy there, with his pussy cat, laying in the sun. Like the kids say, he was livin' his best life.

FEMME FATALE

Never knew he was a wrong number. Me and him, we used to drink from the same bottle.

PRIVATE DICK

I said--I think he still cares. But maybe he needed that special someone.

FEMME FATALE

Yeah, *(sniff)* must be nice.

PRIVATE DICK

It can be, I said. And--truth be told--I had no idea what the heck I was doing, but I reached down into the pocket of the chunky cardigan sweater Aunt Betty knit for me and felt around and there, in the left-hand pocket, was a string of pearls, like some magical gift, like something out of a movie. I pulled them out and said: A string o' oyster fruit would look pretty swell hanging around that neck o' yours. Her eyes got wide and she fluttered her eye lashes--I never noticed before how long and soft her eye lashes were--and she said--

FEMME FATALE

Gee, I never imagined a guy like you would come along and save me from myself.

PRIVATE DICK

And I said, Hey, it's time you caught up on your feminist theory. I'm not here to save you. You don't need saving. But you do need some Vitamin D. Seriously, you spend way too much time indoors. And she said,

FEMME FATALE

Hey I can trip for biscuits. You wanna go climb up your thumb and skate a tortilla tumble.

PRIVATE DICK.

(Sigh) Seriously, not a word. But it definitely sounds vaguely racist.

End of play