

A DETECTIVE TOMMY VEASY MYSTERY
From the Screenwriter of *Fort Apache*, *The Bronx*



PRODUCTION NAME

**GREEN LIGHT
FOR MURDER**

AUTHOR

HEYWOOD GOULD

A MAD DIRECTOR, off his meds, is making a movie about how he murders the producers who ruined his career. The movie is in his mind. The murders are real.

Tommy Veasy, a pot-smoking homicide detective—our hero—who writes poetry to help him solve cases and ward off despair, thinks he sees a pattern in these seemingly accidental deaths. His colleagues think he's being dramatic.

But the bodies keep piling up.

The staff of a syndicated TV show in its tenth year, formerly an international hit but now only being aired in Montenegro and Botswana, worries about how they will maintain their Hollywood lifestyles when they become unemployable. How will the producer finance his two-hooker-a-weekend habit? How will the staff writer pay private school tuition, an underwater mortgage, tennis club dues, the housekeeper, the gardener, cable TV bills, the couples' therapist, et al.?

Not a big problem: the mad director has planted a bomb in the office phone and is frantically trying to set it off.

And meanwhile, a home invader keeps invading the wrong homes, to everyone's perplexity.

In other words: it's just another day in paradise.



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GREEN LIGHT FOR MURDER

by

Heywood Gould

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE MADMAN	Jay Braffner
THE POET	Detective Tommy Veasy
THE PRODUCER	Lester Tarsis
THE PARTNER	Detective Cheri Tingley
CHIEF OF POLICE	George Jonas
SQUAD COMMANDER	Felipe Mineo
PRODUCERS	Dave Kessel
	Mitch Helfand
	Gary London
STAFF WRITERS	Sean O'Meara
	Noah Lippman
MR. TARSIS'S ASSISTANT	Eloise Gruber
EDITOR	Elliot Kriegsfeld
ASSISTANT EDITOR	Zack Toledano
SOCIAL WORKER	Alison Sobel
EXPLOSIVE EFFECTS	Roy Farkas

FADE UP ON...

THE MADMAN AND HIS IMAGINARY FILM CREW

Jay Braffner is in the wine cellar of producer Dave Kessel's Malibu beach house. Outside, an exterminating crew is draping a blue termite tent over the roof. Inside, the film crew in Jay's head is executing his instructions.

"Best crew I ever had, Dave, Jay says. "I think it and they do it."

The script appears in flaming letters in his mind.

"Tight TWO SHOT of Braffner and Kessel."

The answer comes back:

("tight two shot, boss.")

"Full crew, Dave," Jay says. "Showed up in my head one morning. Young, eager to learn. No overtime, no meal penalties because they don't eat. No muttering behind my back. Best of all, no teamsters..."

Jay calls: "Let the tent billow."

("tent's billowing boss.")

"Remember how I tried to sell you this shot on *AUTOCOP*, Dave?" he asks.

Kessel shakes his head.

Jay pulls a pair of latex gloves over his thick wrists. "The script had a boring murder on a suburban street. Let's put blue termite tent over the house, I said. The murderer is disguised in an exterminator's uniform. He ties the victim up and leaves him to die when they turn on the gas. Remember, Dave?"

Kessel's bloodshot eyes bulge above the black gaffer tape covering his nose and mouth.

"You blew me off, Dave," Jay says. "Artsy fartsy, you said. Three months later the exact same scene showed up in another episode with Lester Tarsis's name on it..."

Kessel writhes and struggles with muffled pleas.

"That's it Dave, beg for your life," Jay says. "That'll play great."

He twists Kessel's head toward the window where the blue tent is settling gently like a giant bed spread. "Now we cut to this morning. I'm trying to think of a cool, cinematic way to kill you. I see the termite truck in front of your house and I realize the movie gods are sending me a message. So I get a uniform and disguise myself as an exterminator."

Kessel tries to elbow his way free, but Jay puts him in a headlock. "Bayside High Wrestling, Dave. City champs..." He squeezes so hard Kessel's cheekbones crack. "Stop fighting and I'll let go." Kessel gets very still. Jay rips the tape off his mouth and he explodes in gulping breaths.

"For Chrissake, Jay, that was 1995."

"Seems like yesterday to me," Jay said.

"What did I do so bad to you?"

"You stole my ideas and gave them to Lester Tarsis."

Kessel sobs. "I didn't have any ideas of my own. Do I deserve to die for that?"

"If you did, Hollywood would be a ghost town," Jay says. "You're dying because you screwed me."

"Lester made me do it, Jay. He's the one you should be after."

"Lester's on my list, too, Dave."

Jay reaches onto the wine rack for a bottle of Armagnac and holds the label up to the light. “Chateau de Laubade, 1922. My mother was born in 1922. It took me eight years in analysis to uncover my primal memories of seeing her screwing somebody while my dad was at Yonkers Raceway. By then she was dead and I couldn’t ask her if the guy was my Uncle Willie. See, I thought it was him because I had an olfactory sense memory of his cheap cigars that came up whenever I had sex. It was giving me serious performance issues...”

Kessel blubbers. “Lester had us at each other’s throats, Jay. ”

Jay pops the cork. “The TV money kept pouring in, Dave. Lester bought income properties in the Valley. I pissed mine away on coke and bimbos. You assembled the most famous collection of vintage Armagnac in the world. Made the cover of *Gourmet Magazine*...”

Kessel dribbles green bile out of the corner of his mouth. “Gimme a break, Jay...”

“This is film noir, Dave, no happy endings.” Jay grabs Kessel by the back of the neck and jams the bottle down his throat. “Let’s drink a last toast to you and your fabulous collection.”

Kessel gags and sputters: “No Jay!”

Jay lifts Kessel by the seat of his pants and the back of his collar and rams him into the rack. Bottles tumble, bouncing off his head.

“Take Two, Dave,” Jay says. He takes a crow hop and rams him into the rack again.

Kessel goes limp. Jay eases him down to the floor, giving terse commands to the crew. “PAN DOWN and PUSH IN to a TIGHT SHOT as Jay takes the tape off Kessel’s wrists and ankles...”

(“*Panning...*”)

“TIGHT ON JAY as he pours the rest of the booze over Kessel to make it look like a drunken accident...”

(“Tight on Jay.”)

Jay closes the wine cellar door and walks quickly down the hall. “See how the sun shines through the tarp,” he says. “Has anyone ever made a shot through the tent of a fumigated house?”

(“no one but you boss”)

Jay slips through the back door and scrambles out from under the tent. Two exterminators in blue uniforms are standing by the pool

“Thought I heard a dog barking in the house,” Jay says. “Must have been next door.”

From the beach he watches as they wind thick ropes around the tent and turn on the gas. Nobody sees him shedding the exterminator’s uniform and putting it in a Trader Joe’s shopping bag. He strips down to his black Speedos and trudges through the burning sand to the cool shore where he splashes water on the back of his neck. “Just another other over-the-hill, over-tanned, pony-tailed New York transplant,” he confides to the crew. “Thousands of us came out here to make it big. We look alike, think alike. Love the beach, the blondes, the free parking. Meet one of us you’ve met us all. But there’s one big difference...”

The crew supplies the answer.

(“you are a great film maker.”)

“Thank you,” Jay says.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE POET MAKING LOVE

Five miles down the Pacific Coast Highway in a cluttered studio on a beach block in Venice, Detective Tommy Veasy, La Playita PD, is reciting an impromptu poem to his partner, Detective Cheri Tingley

To be a police romancer

You must keep the requests selective

To get the desired answer

From the sensual detective...

“I feel like I’m being undressed by Snoop Dog,” Detective Tingley says, raising her arms.

Detective Veasy unclips her sequin halter top. “I was thinking more Lord Byron.”

Tingley arches her back so he can slip off her jeans. “You recite poetry to distract me, but I know you’re taking off my clothes.”

“That’s because you’re a trained law enforcement professional...”

“Silly shirt,” she says, pulling at his buttons. “Palm trees and coconuts...”

“Hey, that’s my Tommy Bahama knockoff. Fourteen fifty at Costco...”

“Funny when you see somebody naked for the first time. It’s never the way you thought it was going to be.” She grazes her nail over his nipple. “What does that line mean: *to get the desired answer?*”

“That if I say the wrong thing I’ll lose the moment.”

Tingley sits up. "You think you talked me into this? I knew I would be coming back to your place all along. Even got my mom to sit with my son."

Veasy blows gently over her body.

"Did you ever notice how the slightest puff of air can make a woman's breasts quiver?"

"Nobody in the squad can know about this," Tingley says.

"You mean I don't get to brag about my conquest? Anyway, it's too late."

Tingley sits up again.

"What do you mean?"

"Something passes between people who are having a love affair. The energy flow changes. Others can sense it."

She lies back down. "I don't care about energy flow. Just as long you don't write a poem about it and post it on the department web site."

Veasy slides his nose over her neck

"What are you doing?"

"Breathing you in."

Tingley puts her hands behind her head.

"Oh God, this is why I've been putting it off."

"Why?"

"Because I was afraid I was going to like it."

"Don't worry," Veasy says.

He rises over her.

"I'll make it as brief and unpleasant as possible."

THE NEXT MORNING

The crew squeezes into Jay Braffner's tiny bedroom, as he gets ready to pitch a show.

("dusty...")

"I was in the psycho ward for a year, but the house went on as if I was here," Jay says. "I was on auto pay for the mortgage, phone and the Internet. The Directors Guild direct deposited my residuals. The mail was dropped inside the door. Jay Braffner's life continued without Jay Braffner... You can call me the Invisible Madman."

("great title...")

"When I walked in yesterday it was as if I had never left. I was knee deep in Victoria's Secret catalogues..."

("defining moment.")

'Nobody knows I was gone. So let's hit the ground running... Action...'

("rolling...")

Jay slips into a safari jacket. "This is the famous drop dead meeting. Most deals are presold by the big players, but the network has to take meetings with old guys like me to make it look like they're running an open market place..."

The crew is impressed.

("so that's how it works...")

"CAMERA, follow me," Jay orders.

It's a short walk down a narrow hall to the living room. Faces from his past appear like sconces in the wall. Dead friends glide by in the shadows.

“In the old days I would have been pitching to a guy just like me,” Jay says. “Same age, New York type guy. A guy I could talk to. Hang out with at Dan Tana’s. He’d have an assistant, a “D” girl, for “Development,”— but really for D-cup (*pause for laughter*)— taking notes, skirt hiked to shoot me some panty peek. If I sold the idea she’d flash me the cleavage signal while stamping my parking pass and I’d ask her out for drinks...”

(wait for the admiring murmurs to die down)

“Six o’clock, “Jay says.” I pick her up in my ’76 MG... Drive out of the lot with the top down. Guard at the gate waves. ’Night Mr. Braffner...’ I cruise down Cahuenga, rolling a joint with one hand—little trick that never fails to impress—people flashing the “Peace” sign from passing cars. Stop at Roy’s on Sunset where I know I’ll get a big hello. The bartender comes over on cue... Two Bombay Martinis, Eric, straight up, extra olives. I slip her the vial when she goes to the john. Always a heavy hitter in one of the booths. She comes back, eyeballs polished and gushes: Warren Beatty’s here...

“I order a big meal for form’s sake. She’s too wired to eat. More actors coming over. She’s knocked out... Isn’t that...? I saw him in... Now wash down a ‘lude with a Remy Martin. She’s giggling, clinging to my arm like it’s driftwood from the Titanic. My Jacuzzi or yours? Can’t wait for the hot tub to fill up. Bumping in the darkness, blind as cavefish. Next thing we know the sun is burning hot stripes on the sheets. She panics. Left her car at the studio. *Ta da...!* I come up with a C-note and Beverly Hills Cab. Taxi home, freshen up and taxi to the studio, darlin’. My treat ‘cause you’re great. The second she’s gone I can’t remember her face. Draw the blinds, blast the AC and settle into the musky sheets for a beauty sleep...”

(“must have been a fun time.”)

“Everybody was working,” Jay says. “Stifled, frustrated, underpaid and undermined...But working...”

He smiles bravely. “Oh well, can’t dwell on past glory.” He takes a breath, pastes on a smile and enters the empty room. “Hi, is this the lion’s den? You called for a Christian?” No laugh. “Diversity TV,” he confides, pointing to the empty chairs. “There’s the Ivy League black chick who thinks I’m just another obsolete white man. A gay guy who is Googling me on his iPhone because he hasn’t a clue who I am. A pasty-faced snot flicker, M.A. in film studies who sneers at everything I ever did. And a severe chick with glasses, who hates me at first sight because I look like the professor who groped her in the American Lit seminar...Or didn’t ...”

(let the helpless laughter subside.)

“Normally, I couldn’t sell *American Idol* in this room,” Jay says. “But I’m about to blow their minds. Watch...” He clears his throat to get their attention. “There are two questions everybody asks in this town,” he begins. “One: How did that asshole get that job...?”

(hiccup of a laugh from the gay guy.)

“And Two: Why has nobody ever murdered a producer?”

Chairs creak.

“If they move toward you they’re sold, “ Jay says.” If they sit back, you’re a loser...”

He jumps up to pull focus.

“Nobody can answer Question One. Nobody can explain why so many morons are given power in this town...”

(nods of assent)

“But I can answer Question Two. Somebody has finally murdered a producer...Me.”

Jaws drop. “I’m about simplicity so I call the show I Murder a Producer.”

(They like the title.)

”In case you’re wondering I already have one episode in the can, I Murder Dave Kessel. Dave was an all night shoot so I’m a little tired and probably look like crap. I don’t do the powder pick-me-up thing anymore.”

(knowing smiles.)

“Tonight I’m going to shoot I Murder Mitch Helfand. And tomorrow we’ll do I Murder Gary London...”

They edge even closer. They’re hooked.

“I know you guys like to launch big,” Jay says.” So on Monday...On camera... For your pilot episode... I’m going to murder Lester Tarsis and the entire staff of his syndicated show, SHE, QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE... Don’t ask me how, but trust me, it’ll be explosive.”

ESTABLISH THE LONELY COMMANDER

Let's see if the lovebirds fly in together

George Jonas, Chief of the La Playita PD is sitting by his office window waiting for Veasy and Tingley arrive.

Headquarters is a short walk from Veasy's place on the beach. He strolls into the building a little before seven. Tingley drives in a few minutes later, turning off the PCH like she was coming from her home in Tarzana.

They really think they're fooling me.

A month ago Detective Walsh, his spy on the squad, came to him with the news that Veasy had codenamed him "Owl" for his habit of blinking and squinting in meetings. It's a tic he's had since childhood, a little mild Tourettes actually. He has it controlled with halpoderol, but it pops up sometimes when he's under stress.

It started him thinking about what else Veasy was saying about him. And once you open that can of worms...

Jonas has been seeing Detective Tingley out of school. He doesn't have to ask Walsh if that's generally known—can't keep a secret around a bunch of detectives. Doesn't have to ask if it's gotten around that Veasy has seduced her away from him.

Everyone knows.

Jonas is sensitive about his appearance. He's bald with a fringe of hair over his ears and a trim brush mustache—the best choice after years of experimenting with the shaven head and goatee look, the close cropped beard, even a hair weave. He's in the gym every morning at five. Has his uniforms tailored. Wears a short-sleeved tunic to show his guns. Stuck at five-ten, can't

hope for a growth spurt at his age. Too late for lifts, the squad would notice the difference. And he'd soon have another codename.

Veasy's gotta be six- three. He was a football hero in high school. Hasn't gained a pound or lost a step since then. Hasn't lost a hair since he was fifteen, either. The squad jokes about him, say he looks like Superman with a hangover.

Why do the troops always love the guy who hates the boss?

Jonas checks the closed circuit cameras. Tingley is walking through the garage. Even has a change of clothes.

Bitch thought of everything.

She disappears from view. A couple of seconds and she still doesn't reappear. Veasy hasn't shown either.

"Any blind spots on our video surveillance?" Jonas asks the officer at the desk.

"Cameras are all pointing in one direction. Guess if you pressed against the wall under a camera you wouldn't be seen."

That's it. They met in the blind spot. Flattened against the wall. Kissed and giggled at their little trick.

A second later he sees Tingley on the stairway camera. Then on the lobby camera. Then, she walks right by him.

"Morning."

Veasy appears in the stairwell camera and then in the lobby.

"Morning, Chief."

Lieutenant Mineo, the squad commander, is in the conference room, shuffling reports.

"Morning, Chief..."

Standing at the coffee machine Jonas watches the detectives file in. “Mornin’ Chief...” No smirks in his direction.

Cops are good actors.

Jonas had been discreet, waited until he sensed she was receptive. That first night he had taken her to the French bistro in Altadena, deep in the Valley where they wouldn’t see anybody they knew. Quiet booth. She was impressed. “I never knew you were such a gourmet.”

“Working overseas you learn how to eat well,” he said.

That got a raised eyebrow. “Overseas?”

So he hinted at the top-secret missions. “This is between us, okay.”

A few more dates. He knew all the cool out-of-the-way places. Then, when she took his arm walking back to the car, when the good night kiss lingered, he invited her for dinner. He made Beef Wellington with a layer of pate and a perfect crust. Nice bottle of Cabernet. She was knocked out. “I can’t cook this way. How am I going to reciprocate?”

“We’ll think of something,” he said.

Fifteen minutes after he took the Cialis he felt the blood flowing in a cool current right into his balls.

She was what he needed. Round, comfortable. Big nipples that went rock hard at his touch. Ass like a pillow. A natural, she moved with him like they had been doing it for years.

“Well well,” she said, staring up at the ceiling in a daze.

The bitch was totally faking it.

She was a new promotion from Community Affairs. “I’m going to put Tingley with Veasy, Chief,” Mineo said. “Some of these other guys have an attitude about women on the job...”

Made sense to partner a rookie with an experienced detective. Jonas didn't want to cause suspicion by blocking it. "Sure, let them work together," he said. "Maybe she'll learn something."

One afternoon they came in laughing. He watched from his glassed-in office. Their desks were next to each other, but he saw Veasy texting. Saw her pick up her cell and blush to the roots of her light blonde hair.

They went out for drinks with the squad, but always seemed to pair off like they were hiding in the crowd. Little touches as they passed.

He backed off. Didn't make a date, waiting for her to invite him. But two weeks passed. So he sent her a text about dinner. And she texted back: "Can't get a sitter." She left early. As soon as she was out of the building, Veasy got a call on his cell and smiled.

Secret fucking rendezvous, huh?

For nine years Veasy was the rock star of the La Playita PD, the genius who made all the big cases. Then came the Encarnacion murder. Ten-year-old girl, kidnapped, raped, mutilated. The worse homicide in the history of La Playita.

Veasy couldn't crack it. After months with no leads he got a hunch suspect. Trailed him out of jurisdiction to a house in Redondo beach and almost beat him to death trying to get a confession. Redondo cops had to pull him off the guy.

Mineo had friends on the Redondo PD and got the charge knocked down to harassment. The La Playita City Council put Veasy on an indefinite medical. Even approved his prescription for medical marijuana. He was still on leave when Jonas was hired.

"We're saving a spot for Detective Veasy," Ludwig, City Manager told Jonas. "You'll have to work shorthanded until he gets back."

He didn't want to start the job with a bad taste so he played it nice. "Sure, it'll be a challenge for the rest of the squad."

He met Veasy for the first time three months later at the "welcome home" party the squad threw for him. They shook hands, sized each other up and it's been total war ever since.

Jonas sits at the head of the conference table and murmurs into his mini-recorder. "Thursday, the tenth, seven-thirty, squad meeting..."

He watches the two of them as Mineo drones over the day's work. All business. No secret looks.

They think they're so slick.

"Missing Person," Mineo says. "Alison Sobel. Outpatient Services at Harbor UCLA Psychiatric Center...Left her office to visit patients in La Playita...Didn't call in...Hasn't reported for work...Driving a charcoal Honda Civic, plate number GEU479Z...Boyfriend reported her missing."

"Do we have a list of the patients she was visiting?" Jonas asks.

"Working on it," Mineo says. "Here's a new one on me. Accidental death by termite gas...David Scott Kessel, TV producer. They were tenting his house yesterday afternoon. Crew found him in his wine cellar this morning."

"Interesting," Veasy says. He taps his teeth with a pencil. "No signs of a struggle?"

"Head wounds incurred when he fell into the metal wine rack. His ex wife says he had gone in to remove his vintage Armagnac collection. Looks like he had a few drinks and passed out. No one was seen entering or leaving..."

"Mr. Kessel entered, but never left," Veasy says. "I'll have a chat with the exterminators."

The squad looks at Jonas. Veasy is claiming the case before it is officially assigned. A definite breach.

Don't take the bait.

Jonas shakes his head, curtly.

“It’s an accident until proven otherwise. I don’t want to carry an unsolved homicide on the books.”

Veasy scribbles in his notebook.

Act amused.

“A little poem Veasy?”

Veasy closes the book. “Just wanted to jot a few thoughts before I forgot them.”

“Share them with us. If they’re not too private...”

“Actually I was inspired by something you said, Boss.” Veasy opens the notebook and reads:

“There is no crime in La Playita

Our neighbors are so kind and gentle.

We don’t even have mosquitahs

And death is always accidental...”

Not a sound.

They better not laugh.

Veasy closes the notebook.

“It’s just a first draft,” he says.

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