

Empire Tales

By

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"THE SILVER BRACELET"

FADE IN:

EXT. PARADISE RESORT - BUNGALOW COURTYARD - NIGHT

Bungalow section of an upscale lake resort in upstate New York. One high-rise surrounded by one-story buildings. Has a Mediterranean feel to it with stucco architecture and terra cotta tiles. Dimly lit by lanterns that are set up at regular intervals along the pathways.

Faint SOUNDS of conversations from a faraway and unseen restaurant, then:

WHISTLING. The figure of a MAN approaches from the path that leads to the courtyard. Foot lights along the path draw his outline.

Walking toward the camera, his path would take him past the high-rise. But he stops dead in his tracks and in mid-whistle. Strains to see in the darkness.

PULL BACK to reveal what's he looking at. It's a body lying on the pavement directly underneath the high-rise.

The man runs up to it...

...and looks down on the body of a 50-year old man dressed in a white dinner jacket. He is dead, or close to it.

The man looking down on him is in his early to mid 40s. Leisurely, but well dressed in summer slacks, a polo shirt and canvas shoes. He kneels next to the body.

The victim on the ground gurgles blood, stares at the sky with bug eyes. The man follows his gaze.

ANGLE ON HIGH RISE - the victim came from a long way up.

MAN
(slight German accent)
Hang on. I'm going to get help.

He tries to get up, but the victim grabs his wrist.

There's a golden bracelet lying by the victim's arm.

While the man is busy looking at it, the victim gurgles his last breath and dies.

The man checks his pulse. Dead. As a last thought, he grabs the bracelet and runs off.

INT. PARADISE RESORT - LOBBY - FRONT DESK

The man runs up to the desk. Yells something. The DESK CLERK picks up the phone, dials and hands the receiver to him.

The man puts the bracelet on the counter so he can grab the phone. He is clearly shaken.

Desk clerk eyes the bracelet.

EXT. PARADISE RESORT - BUNGALOW COURTYARD - NIGHT

Harsh flood lights have been set up. The area under the high-rise has been cordoned off by yellow and black POLICE: DO NOT CROSS tape.

NEW YORK STATE TROOPERS and PARAMEDICS are milling around the body. Flashbulbs pop.

A WOMAN, in her late 40s, observes this in silence, wipes tears from here eyes. An older, PLAINLY DRESSED WOMAN, puts an arm around her shoulder and leads her off in the direction of the pool that's visible in the background.

Watching the scene with dazed eyes, from within the cordon is the man who found the body.

He turns and lifts the police tape and is about to cross under it, when a state TROOPER lays a meaty hand on his shoulder.

TROOPER
Detective Bliss will be here any minute.

Man turns around, gives the trooper a cold glance.

MAN
He was going to be here any minute twenty minutes ago.
(beat)
He can find me by the pool.

The trooper takes his hand back. The man walks off.

EXT. RESORT - POOL

The man walks down a set of stairs that leads from the bungalow courtyard to the pool.

The woman who was led away not two minutes ago sits alone in

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a wicker chair. Her downcast face is turned away. A FEMALE TROOPER stands guard a few yards away.

The man pulls up a chair to her and sits down. She is attractive in a severe, silver-haired sort of way. Trim, she wears a light summer dress.

MAN

Mrs. Arnaud? My name is Tomas May.

Mrs. Arnaud looks up and trains her black eyes on Tomas.

MRS. ARNAUD

(French Canadian accent)

You're the one who found...Benoit?

TOMAS

Yes. I'm so sorry.

MRS. ARNAUD

Was he alive when you...?

TOMAS

(quickly)

No.

Mrs. Arnaud is relieved to hear this.

MRS. ARNAUD

You knew him, did you not, Mr. May?

TOMAS

Tomas. We talked once or twice.

MRS. ARNAUD

We were having dinner...I asked him to go back to our room...I had forgot my pills...it's my fault.

Mrs. Arnaud starts to weep. She puts her hand on his.

A SIREN is heard and we hear a car pull up. The Female Trooper turns her back on Tomas and Mrs. Arnaud.

She puts her hand over his.

With his free hand, Tomas reaches into his pocket and pulls out the golden bracelet. Thick links with an inscribed plate.

Mrs. Arnaud's eyes light up at the sight of it.

She runs her finger over the broken link.

TOMAS

Perhaps you'd like to give it to
the police yourself.

She slips the bracelet into her pocket.

MRS. ARNAUD

May I ask you to keep this among
us?

TOMAS

Why? The police should know about
it.

MRS. ARNAUD

I hate to say it, but, with us
being foreigners...

TOMAS

You're afraid they would keep it
because it's valuable?

MRS. ARNAUD

Yes.

She lays a hand on Tomas' arm.

Radio static is heard, squawk comes over the female trooper's radio. She talks into it, then walks over to Tomas and Mrs. Arnaud.

FEMALE TROOPER

(to Tomas)

Detective Bliss wants to see you.

Tomas stands up.

MRS. ARNAUD

Thank you, Tomas.

Tomas looks back at her. She is the picture of the grieving widow, small and fragile.

He gives her a reassuring smile.

EXT. RESORT - BUNGALOWS

A short, bald DETECTIVE in plainclothes is clearly in charge. He is out of shape, his clothes are wrinkled and he's smoking a cigarette. Another detective in a trench coat approaches him and hands him a plastic bag.

CU - Plastic evidence bag.

(CONTINUED)

Contains a small digital still camera.

DETECTIVE
This was in his jacket pocket.

BALD MAN
Did you look through it?

DETECTIVE
Yes. Nothing out of the ordinary.

BALD MAN
Print them anyway.

A uniformed trooper leads Tomas to the Detective.

BALD MAN
I'm Detective Jim Bliss with the
New York State Police.

He shakes hands with Tomas.

TOMAS
Tomas May.

DT. BLISS
The Tomas May?

TOMAS
No. Same name, that's all.

DT. BLISS
But you are German, correct?

TOMAS
What gave it away?

If Dt. Bliss sees the humor in this, he doesn't show it. He puts another cigarette in his mouth (causing Tomas to take a step back) and pulls a notebook from his pocket.

DT. BLISS
What time did you find Mr. Arnaud?

TOMAS
Just after seven thirty. I left the Algonquin at seven twenty-five and the bar's only five minutes or so from here.

Bliss scribbles.

DT. BLISS
You're staying in one of these bungalows, I assume?

TOMAS
Yes, Number 5.

Tomas points to a bungalow a few buildings down from the high-rise.

DT. BLISS
After you found the body, did you go immediately to the front desk to call the police?

TOMAS
Yes.

DT. BLISS
Did you check the body?

TOMAS
Check?

DT. BLISS
Yes. To see if he's dead.

TOMAS
Oh. I checked his pulse.

DT. BLISS
Anything else that might be important? Anything at all?

Tomas hesitates for second. A loud BANG is heard. It's a paramedic closing the back of the ambulance.

TOMAS
No.

DT. BLISS
Very good. I will have more questions later. Right now, I'd like you to meet with Sergeant Davis here. He'll take down your statement. Then you're free to go, but I ask that you let us know if you're planning on leaving for good. Understood?

TOMAS
Understood, Detective.

EXT. PARADISE RESORT - ALGONQUIN BAR - NIGHT

Clock above the bar says 8:30. The bar has a Native American feel to it, with wicker chairs and dream catchers on the walls. Pretty much deserted.

CHARLENE, a very attractive 40-year woman sits at the back table, sipping a glass of white wine. The only other table is occupied by a young, hand-holding couple.

Tomas kisses her on the cheek and sits down across from her with a tall glass of what looks like a mojito.

CHARLENE

How'd it go?

TOMAS

It went.

Silence. Then Tomas reaches for Charlene's hand, but she pulls it away.

CHARLENE

Terrible, isn't it?

TOMAS

Yes. Only a Frenchman would think of diving from his balcony on his vacation.

CHARLENE

What if he was pushed?

(she watches Tomas for a reaction)

Isn't that how it would happen in a mystery novel?

TOMAS

I wouldn't know. How about dinner?

CHARLENE

I ate already. Besides, I don't want to get used to you.

TOMAS

Why? I only found him, I didn't kill him.

CHARLENE

That's not what I meant and you know it.

INT. PARADISE RESORT - BUNGALOW - DAY

Good sized suite, living room/bedroom combo. Tasteful and modern. Lots of white curtains, glass and steel.

Tomas stands in the living room. He has just finished buttoning his shirt. He tucks it into his pressed slacks, steps into his leather sandals.

Charlene comes out of the bedroom. She's wearing a bathrobe. She puts her arms around Tomas, a sign of affection which makes him uncomfortable.

CHARLENE

This certainly helps pass the afternoon.

(beat)

Dinner tonight?

He kisses her on the cheek.

TOMAS

I'll call you.

He extracts himself from her grasp and walks to the door. Before closing the door behind him, he winks at her. She looks disappointed.

INT. STATE POLICE QUARTERS - BLISS'S OFFICE - DAY

Bliss sits in his small, cluttered office, going through a report. He stops reading, reaches for a pile of photos and leafs through them until he finds what he's looking for. Looks from the report to the photo.

DT. BLISS

Sergeant Davis!

Sgt. Davis enters. Bliss shows him the report.

DT. BLISS

Front desk clerk's statement. May had a bracelet in his hand when he made the call from the front desk.

Sgt. Davis is underwhelmed by the news.

SGT. DAVIS

A rich tourist plays with his gold bracelet. So?

Bliss tosses him a photo. Davis looks at it.

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DT. BLISS
Do you remember seeing this the
night of?

Davis shakes his head. Bliss reaches for the phone, checks a number and dials.

EXT. PARADISE RESORT - BUNGALOW 5

Tomas is in a good mood, he whistles as he skips up a flight of steps, opens his bungalow and walks in.

INT. BUNGALOW 5

He throws his towel and book on his bed. Looks at the phone. Blinking red light.

He picks up the receiver and presses a button. The phone is sitting on a glossy piece of paper.

INSERT - Brochure - Tomas May - Book signing - Barnes & Noble, Union Square, New York City, May 12, 2011.

Tomas punches numbers, listens.

PHONE MESSAGE
Mr. May, Detective Bliss here.
There's some more questions I need
to ask you. Sgt. Davis will pick
you up in front of the Paradise at
eight tomorrow morning.

Tomas puts the receiver down. His good mood is gone, he looks worried.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Charlene and Tomas are having dinner. Charlene is talking, Tomas looks like he's somewhere else.

CHARLENE
...which is why I told her that a
Canadian has no place in
California.
(notices that Tomas is in his
own world)
What's the matter? You seem very
distant.

TOMAS

I'm fine. Does it ever seem to you
that holidays are more stressful
than work? Like you never know what
you're supposed to do?

CHARLENE

That's the whole point. What kind
of work do you do?

TOMAS

I told you already.

CHARLENE

I know. But I heard different. Word
around the pool is that
you're Tomas May, the German
Agatha Christie.

TOMAS

(laughing)

Wouldn't that make me a woman?

CHARLENE

Are you? A famous mystery writer, I
mean.

TOMAS

No. I sell commercial insurance in
Cologne.

EXT. PARADISE RESORT - FRONT ENTRANCE - MORNING

Tomas looks at his watch, checks out the cab driver who's asleep at the wheel of his cab. Couple of older guests are taking walks, that's about it for morning activity.

Tomas wipes sweat off his face.

A New York State Police SUV pulls up. Tomas climbs in the back.

INT. POLICE SUV

The driver is Sgt. Davis. Tomas observes as the door buttons go down, locking him in.

TOMAS

How far is the police station?

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CONTINUED:

11.

SGT. DAVIS
Not far.