

FADE IN:

EXT. AERIAL - ASIAN SEA - DAY

In the distance (approaching) - a jagged backbone of mountains rise out of the Asian sea forming an island of cliffs and surf.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

(male, American)

Beautiful Island lies across a strait along the southern curve of the vast belly of Old Country.

EXT. BEAUTIFUL ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

A sub-tropical island of meager farms and shanty tin-roofed huts; the people old and weathered like the island itself.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

From May thru to late October, Beautiful Island lies in the path of vast swirling seasonal storms which the locals call "Typhoon Holidays". A time to drink, party and gamble. And this holiday's name was, "Typhoon Herb".

Just beyond...

EXT. NORTH CITY - CONTINUOUS

...the shadows of tall concrete buildings emerge. Taxis scurry through the busy city streets in the rain.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

Life on Beautiful Island is considered to happen in North City, at least to the people who live there. It's a great place to find your way around. And an easy place to go missing... Like all big cities, it's heart lies in the center, and the streets are its arteries. But here the blood flows yellow, the color of the taxis pouring endlessly through the streets.

EXT. ASIAN SEA - DAY/NIGHT

The ominous sky darkens with the approaching typhoon, as day turns into night.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)
I am not from Beautiful Island... -
But I call it home.

SUPERIMPOSE:

MR. YELLOW

EXT. NORTH CITY - NIGHT (RAIN)

Typhoon Herb pounds North City.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

A party atmosphere and dread, as everyone waits out the storm.

INT. O'CONNELL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The frosted glass door reads: "John O'Connell - Private Investigator" (in reverse).

The driving rain beats against the window. Outside, the streetlights flicker in the storm.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)
Mr. Yellow and I went back a long way. He had been a Golden Boy on the fast-track to power. I'd been a foreign advisor on delicate matters. We called each other friend, but our motives were self-fulfilling. Rumor had him in the thick of a controversial resort development on one of the small islands. But one had to be careful with rumors about, Mr. Yellow.

Mr. Yellow, a large Colonial Asian man, wearing a pastel colored suit, looks around the office from a deep leather lounge chair.

MR. YELLOW
(Colonial)
Very tasteful. Business is good..?

O'CONNELL
As good as the people you work for.

An air-conditioner purrs in the background.

MR.YELLOW
I have a close friend who has experienced a personal tragedy. His niece has been murdered.

O'CONNELL
I'm sorry to hear that.

O'Connell produces a couple of luxury cigarettes.

MR.YELLOW
Yes, thank you.

O'CONNELL
The police..?

Mr.Yellow sighs heavily, his body squeaks against the chair.

MR.YELLOW
The police, yes. Naturally, they have tried to be helpful, but... well, my friend occupies a very sensitive position. It seems his niece was not such a perfect young lady.

O'CONNELL
Drugs?

MR.YELLOW
Hardly! Although... well, there is as yet no indication of this. No, the problem is that she was quite strong-willed. She dropped out of her education, moved into her own apartment in 'New Store Town', and took work... selling 'betel nut'.

INSERT - BETEL NUT STAND: Young, pretty women who work in small glass cages set up along highways and roadsides. Dressed in revealing clothing, they sell themselves, as well as a small green nut dabbed with an amphetamine-laced paste and wrapped in a leaf.

INT. O'CONNELL'S OFFICE - CONTINUING

Mr.Yellow pulls up his briefcase and withdraws a folder.

MR.YELLOW (CONT'D)

Given the need for discretion... I would very much appreciate your unique kind of assistance in this matter.

O'CONNELL

What can you tell me about the murder?

Mr.Yellow hands to file to O'Connell.

MR.YELLOW

Through friends, I was able to obtain a complete copy of the police dossier.

O'CONNELL

Is there anything you can tell me that isn't in that file?

MR.YELLOW

Yes. She had a boyfriend, surnamed King, whom she'd been seeing for a few months. And this diary, which she sent to her uncle a day before her passing.

O'Connell thumbs quickly through it. It appears to be a young girl's diary.

O'CONNELL

Are you sure it's hers?

MR.YELLEW

Her uncle is without doubt. It is in her hand.

O'CONNELL

Anything else?

MR.YELLOW

I'm afraid not. Here are the keys to her apartment. The address, and that of her work, are in the police report.

O'CONNELL

Will I be able to talk with her family?

MR.YELLOW

That is impossible, I'm sorry. They are private, reclusive even. You would recognize her uncle.

O'CONNELL

All right. I'll phone you in a few days. Sooner if I find something.

MR.YELLOW

That is satisfactory, thank you. Good day.

O'CONNELL

Good day.

O'Connell lights another cigarette and continues looking at the file. SCHOOL PHOTO: A young teenage girl. POLAROID PHOTO: Same girl, now a beautiful young woman. POLICE PHOTO: Same young woman, dead in a ditch. POLICE FILE: Next of kin, marked: "unknown".

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

A chemical residue was found on her clothes, and the coroner had also found traces of a gold tooth, but not the tooth itself. According to the policeman's notes, she'd left work at eleven Tuesday night, and wasn't seen again until she was found by a farmer Wednesday morning.

O'Connell looks at the Polaroid again.

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

At least it was a start.

O'Connell turns back to the diary page dated last Monday night.

INSERT - DIARY NOTES:

"soil, happy, lesson, not, son, calm, color, son, color
ask, look, special, west,
soil, calm, love, blue, virtue
dog, sea, calm, get, happy, lesson, building"
(written in Chinese characters)

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

I didn't get it, but I took a moment to write out the words. Next, I put a magnifying glass to the Polaroid.

(MORE)

O'CONNELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 The shot was of her, from the waist up, sitting on some kind of a railing overlooking a blurry view of a city-scape. It was a daytime shot. She looked relaxed, staring confidently into the camera. A few questions were immediate: Who took the photo? When? Where were they? - I had a good friend who might be able to help me with some answers, so I pocketed the photo.

O'Connell jots down an address.

Outside the office window the storm howls.

SUPERIMPOSE:

ONE CORPSE, TWO LIVES

EXT. NEW STORE STREET - NIGHT

O'Connell heads towards an apartment building.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)
 Besides steamed rice, there's nothing more common than a five-floor, poured concrete walk-up.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

O'Connell walks up the stairwell. A door from the stairwell leads onto the roof. The surface is sticky tar pebbled with gravel.

O'CONNELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 She had lived in a small apartment, above the street in New Store Town...

He pauses in the door frame and catches his breath.

O'CONNELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 ...she called home.

Scanning the small rundown roof top structure.

There is a small window hidden by thick curtains. Faint traffic sounds float up from the street. He enters only deep enough to close the door behind him. He feels along the wall and finds the light switch; they flash on and off before kicking firmly on, revealing a man sitting in a padded chair in the corner.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

He was old. His face was pinched by wrinkles, and his clothes seemed to be too wide for his frame and height.

O'CONNELL

Who are you?

OLD MAN

I should ask the same of you..!

O'CONNELL

I'm an investigator.

Pulling out a business card, handing it to the old man.

OLD MAN

And what are you investigating here?

O'CONNELL

The unfortunate death of the young lady who used to live here.

OLD MAN

I too, am interested in the young lady's death.

O'CONNELL

How so?

OLD MAN

She was my niece.

O'CONNELL

I've seen the police report. It said she had no family.

OLD MAN

Then why are you here?

O'Connell does not answer.

OLD MAN (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Perhaps my family matter and your investigation have some connection.

O'CONNELL

How do I know you are who you say you are?

The Old Man takes out a wallet from his inside jacket pocket, producing a couple of tattered photos.

INSERT - PHOTO OF GIRL: what appears to be her family. The
SECOND PHOTO - SAME GIRL standing with the Old Man.

O'CONNELL (CONT'D)

May I keep these?

Old Man reaches for their return.

OLD MAN

They are all that I have left of
her.

O'Connell hands the photos back.

O'CONNELL

What do you know about your niece's
murder?

OLD MAN

Only what I have read in the
papers.

O'CONNELL

Why was there no mention of her
family?

OLD MAN

Through intermediaries, I have been
able to keep her identity out of
police hands, yet collect her
remains.

O'CONNELL

Why the secrecy?

OLD MAN

Information is like an ocean; it
comes and goes with the tide. Our
family has been on Beautiful Island
for six generations. We lived
through occupation and repression.
We have known both wealth and
poverty. Time has made us aware of
the changing fortunes of the tides.
My father was not a rich man, but
he understood the value of an
education. I became a doctor, and
my brother a lawyer. Only my third
brother married. And he had one
child... a girl. And I felt for
him. Without a son... it was the
death of his family, the end of a
line.

O'CONNELL
Why all the interest in the fate of
his daughter?

OLD MAN
Justice..!

O'CONNELL
Do you know anything about this
boyfriend, King?

OLD MAN
I know of no boyfriend. She was a
good girl.

O'CONNELL
No friends?

OLD MAN
I'm sure she had friends.

O'CONNELL
What about a job?

OLD MAN
I believe she was a waitress in a
restaurant here in 'New Store
Town'.

O'CONNELL
You know which one?

OLD MAN
I'm afraid not.

He pauses and rubs his stomach.

OLD MAN (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Suddenly, I'm starving.

O'CONNELL
I know this Noodle Stand, just
around the corner.

OLD MAN
(laughs)
Right now, I would even eat
Colonial food.

EXT. NOODLE STAND - DAY

O'Connell and the Old Man are seated at a Noodle Stand, each eating a large bowl of steamed noodles.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

All the while there was no mention how the young girl came to her death. I gave him the few details I had from the police report. Told him about the diary, and showed him the lines of gibberish. But he couldn't make any more sense out of it than I could. And then left, as mysteriously as he appeared.

OLD MAN

Till later then.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

There was one corpse, but two lives. - Someone was lying.

O'CONNELL

Till later...

Old Man rises, walks to the curb, flags a yellow car, and is gone.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

He left me no closer to the truth. And he didn't even pay for his food.

SUPERIMPOSE:

BETEL NUT STAND

INT. PHOTO SHOP - DAY

A small photo shop; a simple counter, a few cameras in a glass case, and a curtain, presumably leading to a back room.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

I dropped off the Polaroid to a friend of mine in North City. He had a way of working wonders with a photograph.

INT. BACK SEAT OF TAXI - CITY TRAFFIC - DAY

O'Connell climbs into the taxi, and it pulls away.

O'CONNELL (V.O.)

I made my way down Roosevelt Road, back into New Store Town. It gave me time to work out an angle with the betel nut girls.