

smARTfilms

darkness at noon



Body Heat (1981) film notes by Tova Gannana

Ned Racine (William Hurt) stands at the window watching a fire downtown in the night.

“My history is burning up out there,” Ned says to the woman in his room who is buttoning her blouse, getting dressed. She wants his attention; he is distracted by the blaze. He says, “It’s the Seawater Inn. My family used to eat dinner there twenty-five years ago. Now somebody’s torched it to clear the lot. Probably one of my clients.” Outside the air is orange and full of smoke. From the beginning, Ned, blonde hair slicked back and mustache heart-shaped above his lips, is guilty. He is part of the destruction of Palm Beach County, Florida where he lives. It is not the people in *Body Heat* (1981) that are burning up, but the earth around them done in by the work of their own hands.

“Mr. Racine, the next time you come into my courtroom I hope you’ve got either a better defense or a better class of client.” Judge Costanza tells Ned at the bench. Beside him stands Assistant Prosecutor Lowenstein (Ted Danson), who is never without his glasses, who hides his eyes behind them. He will see in Ned what Ned doesn’t want to see.

The heat makes everyone groggy and hungry, it makes Ned restless and susceptible. He goes to the pier one night, a jazz band plays, he lights his cigarette. The lights around him are red and white; their glow adds to the heat. A woman in a white dress rises from her seat. She walks towards Ned, passing him like a flame, without a glance. Ned follows her to the wooden railing by the beach. The ocean before them is black and endless and the music behind them faint. Her husband, she tells Ned, “only comes up on the weekends.” Which means one thing to Ned. She too is restless. Ned buys her a cherry snow cone that she spills on her dress. He guesses where she lives, “You’re staying down in Pinehaven, on the waterway. You have a house. You look like Pinehaven.” She replies, “How does Pinehaven look?” Ned slowly enunciates, “Well-tended.” Ned is a lawyer and Matty Walker (Kathleen Turner) is married to an older man who owns a lot of real estate. Matty disappears on Ned that night, but he finds her in Pinehaven Tavern where they sit side by side at the wooden bar, their drinks filled with ice. Ned tries to find a way in. “What are you doing in Pinehaven?” She asks him. He replies, “I’m no yokel I was all the way to Miami once.”





Ned only sees as far as the next scene. At night he goes on runs; out of breath, he pulls out his pack of smokes. He doesn't wear a full suit during the day, his coat he hangs on his shoulder, over his arm, or he throws it on the back of his chair. Ned meets his friends, Lowenstein and Oscar (J.A. Preston), a police detective, regularly at Stella's Diner downtown. They drink Coca Cola and iced tea, Oscar orders cherry pie. The blinds in Stella's are always drawn, but the light comes in. Before Matty, the three friends with one another shared everything.

In the Pinehaven Tavern, Matty tells Ned, "My temperature runs a couple degrees high, around a hundred. I don't mind, it's the engine or something." But there is no heat inside her, she is cold like an amphibian. Matty is no different than Ned's client who sets the Seawater Inn on fire. Only it's not a building but a man she needs getting rid of. "We're going to kill him," Ned tells her in an embrace, "It's what you want, isn't it? We knew it was coming. It's the only way we can have everything we want." What they want isn't just one another; they want the money Matty's husband has made from his shady real estate deals. In the 1980s America a man and his associates can buy up a whole town, can knock down buildings to expose valuable empty lots. They inspire copy cats, men who want to be like them, men who set fires. Matty who is not a man, needs one to light the match.

At the Pinehaven Tavern, with a piano playing in the background, Ned tells Matty, "I know that sometimes the shit comes down so heavy I should wear a hat." She buys him a hat and gives it to him one night at the beach. He puts it on; she rolls up her car window so he can see his reflection. Now he sees both of them, he no longer sees just himself.



Oscar tells Ned, who he doesn't want to suspect of murder but begins to, "You've messed up before and you'll mess up again. It's your nature. But they've always been small time. She's trouble Ned, real thing big time major league trouble. Watch yourself." It seems the hat Matty has given Ned he'll be left with, holding it in his hand, alone. Under a street lamp on the pier, Lowenstein dancing in the style of Fred Astaire is hoping to catch Ned during one of his night runs. He tells Ned, "Someone is putting you into deep trouble, my friend." Like with arson, it's too late. Ned will have the rest of his life to ruminate, in his cell lying sleepless between white sheets.

Ned with a gun in his hand last sees Matty as she's walking away in her white dress. Like a ghost on her expansive green lawn, she flickers, shadows all around her, she's gone.

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Festival Winners

CURATED BY TJ FADDIS
TUESDAYS, JULY 5-AUGUST 6

FEATURED FILMS:
July 9 - **JAFAR PANAHI'S TAXI**
Winner - Berlin International Film Festival

July 16 - **THE GUILTY**
Winner - National Board of Review, SIFF & Sundance Film Festival

July 23 - **HUKKLE**
Winner - San Sebastian Film Festival & Paris Film Festival

July 30 - **CAPERNAUM**
Winner - 2018 Cannes Film Festival Grand Jury Prize

August 6 - **SITA SINGS THE BLUES**
Winner - Berlin International Film Festival