

"X-Ray Vision"

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Screen Story #18

FADE IN:

EXT. - AN AMERICAN SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - 1950s - DAY

In an American suburb in the 1950s, an awkward teenager, TOM, is doing his paper route. He is riding his bike along a street of two-story tract houses, tossing newspapers to homes on either side. He passes ordinary neighbors: a tubby mailman delivering mail, two middle aged women gabbing on the sidewalk, a milkman delivering bottles of milk, an elderly man and woman walking a dog and an overweight woman in a nightgown coming out to her mailbox.

When all the newspapers are gone, he approaches his own house and gets off his bike. On the sidewalk in front of the house next to his, three pretty teenage girls are talking conspiratorially among themselves. One of them is MARY JANE his new neighbor.

MARY JANE

Hi, Tom!

The two other girls laugh, and we wonder if TOM is the butt of a joke.

TOM

(little more than a grunt)

Hi.

TOM looks very uncomfortable.

MARY JANE

How did your paper route go?

It is hard to tell if she is genuine or mocking, but the other girls laugh.

TOM pretends to ignore them and gets the mail from the mailbox in front of his house. Then he goes inside.

CUT TO:

INT. - TOM'S BEDROOM

TOM comes into his bedroom, which is in the front corner of the second floor. He sits down on his bed and starts reading a magazine that just arrived in the mail. It is "Popular Gadgets" -- obviously a magazine for mechanically inclined males. On the cover is an artist's conception of a futuristic flying car, accompanied by the headline: "FLYING CARS: EVERYONE WILL HAVE ONE!"

As TOM flips through the magazine, we see what he does: a how-to article on building a darkroom in your basement, the flying car article, an advertisement for vacuum tubes at bargain prices and ads for all sorts of dubious products for insecure boys. TOM stops on a full page ad for some sort of muscle building product. "NO LONGER A WEAKLING!" it says. It shows the exaggerated "before" and "after" photos of a young man who supposedly used the product, transforming him from a beanpole to an Adonis. After dwelling on that one for a moment, TOM turns the page to an ad for...

SVENGALI'S AMAZING X-RAY GLASSES! Due to a remarkable scientific breakthrough, these amazing "sunglasses" allow you to see through wood, paper, foliage, window drapes and cloth -- or so the ad claims. Their main purpose, however, is made clear in the not-so-subtle illustration, where a man wearing the glasses is shown ogling a shapely young woman. "SEE THROUGH CLOTHING!" the ad asserts.

TOM looks out his bedroom window at the three girls outside the house next door, who he can barely see through the trees. They are very attractive. The girls are saying goodbye to each other. MARY JANE stays, because it is her house, but the other girls leave.

TOM looks back at the ad: "SEE THROUGH CLOTHING."

MARY JANE then appears in her bedroom window, which happens to be directly across from TOM's. TOM quickly hides so he can see MARY JANE but she can't see him. MARY JANE starts to undress...

Unfortunately, she pulls down the window shade before anything significant is revealed.

TOM looks down at the ad: "SEE THROUGH WINDOW SHADES," it says.

With scissors, TOM cuts the order form out of the ad.

FADE TO:

EXT. - SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

Sometime later, TOM is finishing up with his paper route then checks the mail in his mailbox. His package has arrived! He looks up and down the street, but there is no one nearby, so he eagerly opens it.

Inside the brown outer package is a brightly colored inner box saying "SVENGALI X-RAY VISION GLASSES." Inside the box is what looks like a pair of ordinary sunglasses.

Cautiously, with great anticipation, TOM puts them on.

Then he takes them off, puts them on again then takes them off. Clearly he is not impressed.

On the other side of the street, a man in casual clothing comes out to get the newspaper on his front lawn. As he is returning to the house, TOM puts the glasses back on, and we see what he does...

The man is buck naked! The glasses work!

With the glasses on, TOM gets back on his bike and starts slowly riding through the same neighborhood he just delivered papers to. We can't see what he sees, but we can tell by the way he is looking around that he is seeing the world in a whole new way. He passes a tubby mailman delivering mail, two middle aged women gabbing on the sidewalk, a milkman delivering bottles of milk and an elderly man and woman walking a dog. TOM's face displays a combination of fascination and revulsion. When he passes the overweight woman in a nightgown, he has to shield his eyes and turn away.

CUT TO:

EXT. - MAIN STREET OF A SMALL TOWN - DAY

Now TOM is walking down the crowded sidewalk of Main Street in the center of town, with his glasses on. There's a smirk on his face as he looks around and drinks it all in. Unfortunately, none of the people he passes are particularly attractive.

He takes the glasses off and puts them in his shirt pocket, then he crosses the street to a town park.

CUT TO:

EXT. -- SMALL TOWN PARK - DAY

TOM sits down on a park bench, with the glasses in his shirt pocket.

About 50 feet away are two shapely college-age women talking to each other. Here is the true test of his glasses! Savoring the moment, TOM slowly retrieves the sunglasses from his pocket, unfolds them and brings them toward his face.

Just then, a hand reaches from behind and snatches them away!

TOM spins around and sees that it's...

MARY JANE!

MARY JANE

What's this?

This time, she is definitely speaking in a mocking manner.

TOM

Hey, those are mine!

He lunges for the glasses, but MARY JANE pulls them just out of reach.

TOM

They're just sunglasses, but
they're mine!

MARY JANE

Oh, really. Do you mind if I try
them?

TOM

No! I mean, yes, I do mind.
Actually, they're not mine. I found
them.

MARY JANE

Well, if they're not yours, then
you can't object to me trying them.

MARY JANE puts the glasses on.

MARY JANE

(in a mocking tone)

My, my! There's Denise Crosby and
Sue Miller, and they're not wearing
any clothes!

TOM

They're not mine. I just found
them.

MARY JANE

Oh? Where did you find them?

TOM

(thinking quickly)

Behind the hardware store.

MARY JANE

Really.

TOM is dying of embarrassment now and doesn't know what to say.

MARY JANE takes off the glasses.

MARY JANE

Don't worry, I'm not going to look at you.

MARY JANE then does something unexpected: She comes around the bench and sits down beside TOM.

MARY JANE

You know, everyone's naked under their clothes. It took me the longest time to figure that out. It wasn't until I was maybe eight that I figured out that people and their clothes are two different things. I guess I'm a slow learner.

Wow, now there's a specimen!

She points to a fat man in the distance. Then she puts on the glasses.

MARY JANE

Quite the layer of flesh on that one. Do you want to see?

She hands the glasses to TOM, but he shakes his head, and she takes them back.

MARY JANE

You know, it's okay to think about naked women. All the boys do it. You could say it's nature's way.

TOM

Do you think about naked men?

MARY JANE

Sometimes, but not as much as you think about naked girls. It's all kind of weird and confusing to me. You know, I haven't had these for very long [pointing at her own breasts]. Sometimes when I see a handsome guy, I want to reach out and touch, maybe even rip his clothes off, but another part of me is repulsed by the whole thing. Sex is really messy you know.

TOM

Uh-huh.

Clearly, MARY JANE has gone far beyond TOM's maturity level.

MARY JANE

So why don't you talk to me?

TOM

Huh?

MARY JANE

We moved in six months ago, and you've never said more than one word to me the whole time. It's like I'm some kind of monster or something. That's got to change.

TOM

(a bit stunned)

Okay.

MARY JANE

I'm going home. Are you going to walk with me?

TOM

I guess so.

Both of them get up from the bench and start walking.

CUT TO:

EXT - SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

We are on the sidewalk in front of TOM's and MARY JANE's houses. We can see them approaching in the distance. TOM is walking his bike, and MARY JANE is walking beside him. We can't hear what they are saying, but they seem to be engaged in a real conversation.

They stop in front of MARY JANE's house.

MARY JANE

You see, that wasn't so hard. I counted at least 50 words. Maybe we'll talk again sometime.

TOM

Definitely.

MARY JANE

See you tomorrow!

She heads toward her front door but then stops and turns back to TOM.

MARY JANE

I almost forgot. Here are your stupid glasses.

She hands them to him.

TOM
(sheepishly)

Thanks.

MARY JANE

Bye.

TOM

Bye.

Both TOM and MARY JANE go into their houses.

CUT TO:

INT - TOM'S BEDROOM

Tom enters his bedroom and sits down on his bed. He is trying to process it all.

He looks out his window at MARY JANE's window.

Then MARY JANE appears in the window. She smiles warmly at TOM, waves, then closes the window shade.

TOM sits on his bed, staring at the closed window shade.

CUT TO:

INT -- MARY JANE'S BEDROOM

After closing the window shade, MARY JANE sits down at her desk. She, too, stares pensively at the closed window shade. She seems a little worried.

CUT TO:

INT - TOM'S BEDROOM

After some deliberation, TOM reaches into his shirt pocket for the glasses.

He slowly unfolds them in front of him.

Instead of putting them on, however, he reaches over and drops them in the wastebasket.

CUT TO:

INT -- MARY JANE'S BEDROOM

A broad smile comes over MARY JANE's face.

It is as though she knows TOM has thrown away the glasses, even though she can't see him.

She then opens a drawer of her desk and pulls something out. It is a colorful box for some kind of consumer product. It resembles the box TOM received his glasses in. On the cover of the box is printed the name of the product...

"SVENGALI MIND READING KIT."

She holds the box in her hand for a moment, then she reaches over and drops it in the wastebasket.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END