

Desperately Seeking Madonna

FADE IN:

EXT. STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - DAY

We hear 80's hair band MUSIC, a la Twisted Sister, Poison, AC/DC, etc.

Rickety shopping carts CLANG into each other. First two, then three, then an endless row.

SUPER: "JUNE, 1985 - NEWBURGH, NY"

JASON, a skinny 17-year-old "geek-a-zoid" with bad skin, fumbles to put the row of carts into a straight line, but he's too clumsy.

The carts scatter and run haphazardly into multiple parked cars and set off multiple CAR ALARMS. The sound becomes deafening. Jason throws his hands up in defeat, then spits on the ground.

JASON  
Fuck this shit!

INT. BIG BOX DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

He enters the sliding glass doors of "MALDOR'S," a large department store that sells everything from gas grills to Wrangler jeans to Tylenol. He glides past the front registers at the store's entrance.

The men standing in line all wear acid-washed jeans and rocker T-shirts. The women have bangs teased to high heaven. Some are in sweats, some have frilled jean jackets. Some of the older women wear Holly Hobbie blouses with puffy sleeves.

Row upon row of cashiers work through their lines of customers. There is nothing extraordinary about any of them, until we see MARY RUBENSTEIN's line, aisle 11.

Mary is in full Madonna-wannabe attire, head to toe. Lace headband, curled hair, black cami with a purple vest over it, bra straps showing, finger-less lace gloves, huge dangle earrings and costume jewelry dripping from every pore. She is 22, dark haired, and a little chubby. The sole Madonna-wannabe, in a city full of Def Leppards.

A TEEN girl in a frilled leather jacket openly scowls as Mary scans her items.

MARY

Okay, that'll be twenty-eight  
seventy-five.

TEEN

Um, did you know you can totally  
see your bra straps?

MARY

Um, do you know that'll be twenty-  
eight seventy-five?

TEEN

I mean, why are you even dressed  
like a low-class hooker?

MARY

(under her breath)

Considering your blue eye shadow, I  
should be asking you the same  
thing, bitch.

TEEN

You can't talk to me like that. I'm  
the customer!

MARY

Well frankly, you're a RUDE  
customer!

TEEN

And you're a freak. A TOTAL FREAK!

The commotion catches the attention of Maldor's store  
manager, MR. PICKLES. He dresses in what the store sells. He  
strides to Mary's register.

MR. PICKLES

Is there a problem, miss?

TEEN

Yeah, this crazy freak here called  
me a bitch!

MR. PICKLES

Is this true, Mary?

MARY

Well... I can't lie. I guess I did,  
Mr. Pickles.

MR. PICKLES

Mary, Mary. Close your register.  
Office now, vamanos muchacha.

INT. MR. PICKLES' OFFICE- DAY

Mr. Pickles' office is on the mezzanine level overlooking the registers. He strides in and Mary glumly follows.

MR. PICKLES

Mary, this is the third time in a month you've mouthed off to one of our valued Maldor's customers. What's the Maldor's motto?

MARY

"The customer's always right, don't ever try to fight, or we'll fire you on site."

MR. PICKLES

That's correct, Miss Rubenstein. And you now have three strikes against you.

He opens his top desk drawer and takes out official reprimand form "L-45".

MR. PICKLES (CONT'D)

You know that I've been tolerant of your... quirks. You've been a valued Maldor's employee since you were 16. I look forward to four years from now when I can hand you your ten-year decorative pen set and fifty-dollar gift certificate.

MARY

Thank you, Mr. Pickles.

MR. PICKLES

But for God's sake, woman, try to fit in. I know legally I can't fire you for dressing like that, but why do you feel the need to emulate some flash in the pan pop whore?

Mary starts to tremble.

MARY

Madonna... is not a... whore! She is a woman who owns her own body and sexuality! She's a dancer, singer, and now an actress.

She points to her *Desperately Seeking Susan* button on her vest.

MARY (CONT'D)  
An *actress*, Mr. Pickles!

MR. PICKLES  
Mimicking that tramp must have the boys beating down your door on Friday nights.

She glares at him.

MR. PICKLES (CONT'D)  
No? I'm so sorry, sign here.

Mary slowly picks up the pen and signs.

MR. PICKLES (CONT'D)  
I know if I send you home to change, you won't. Lord knows I've tried that long road to nowhere many times. But Mary, I want you to take the rest of the day off and think about what I said.

Mary gasps in horror as she completes her signature.

MARY  
I can't leave early, Mr. Pickles. You know I've been asking for more hours. I need the money!

MR. PICKLES  
How can I justify giving you more hours when incidents like this happen? You know the expression "you rub my back and I'll rub yours?" Well, left to you Mary, my back would be dry and crusty. Now, salte de aqui!

Mary turns to exit. On he way out she notices a Gloria Estefan audio cassette on the corner of his desk.

INT. MALDOR'S - DAY

Mary dejectedly walks towards the store entrance and passes JASON posing a family of four mannequins into a "summer soiree" store display. He looks up just in time to see her walk by, and promptly drops the eight mannequin arms he's been holding.

JASON  
Hey! Is everything okay? I saw you go into Mr. Pickles' office.  
(MORE)

JASON (CONT'D)

Did he send you home again? Did he hurt you, Mary? Mary, I swear... I would never, ever let anyone hurt you.

He tries to grab her hand but she slaps him away.

MARY

Whatever, Romeo. Yeah, I got sent home. Some headbanger chick in aisle 11 freaked out on me.

\*

Mary notices the display.

MARY (CONT'D)

Jason, what the hell is that?

The display mannequins are dressed hideously in head to toe neon outfits. Their heads rest by their feet. Glass tumblers, serving dishes, clothing, and accessories are strewn haphazardly.

MARY (CONT'D)

It's like the Texas Chainsaw Massacre meets Devo. Here, let me help.

Mary corrects the display in a flurry of motions. Her hands move furiously.

MARY (CONT'D)

Put the darker colors on the bottom. You never mix gold accessories with neon, duh. Layer, layer, layer... Parachute pants, please.

Jason hands her the pants.

JASON

Wow, Mary, you're a deity of displays -- beautiful *and* smart! Hey, weren't you on the debate team back in high school?

MARY

Ugh, for like a day. I'm terrified of being on stage, so I quit. Hey, give me the green leg warmers over there.

He hands over the leg warmers.

JASON

Thanks for saving my ass.

He touches her elbow; she swats his hand away.

MARY

I am doing this for you out of my endless capacity for pity. You might be a dweeb, but your heart's in the right place. Black clogs, please.

JASON

Hey! Me and my buds on the math team will be drinking in the high school parking lot later tonight, if you want to swing by. I'm sure I can find *some* way to repay you for your help.

Mary finishes her handiwork. The display is tasteful in a repulsive 80's, neon and black kind of way.

MARY

Thanks, but the high school parking lot wasn't that much fun *my* senior year, and now I'm older and --

She looks around the store, frowning.

MARY (CONT'D)

Older.

JASON

An older woman with *experience* --

MARY

More than you can handle, lover boy!

She exits the store.

EXT. NEWBURGH ROADS/INT. MARY'S TERCEL - DAY

Mary drives through the dilapidated Hudson River mill town, decades past its prime.

EXT. RUBENSTEIN TRAILER - DAY

Mary's beat up Toyota Tercel pulls up in front of her home.

INT. RUBENSTEIN TRAILER - DAY

Mary enters the trailer she shares with her mother, BEA, 50s. It's fairly Spartan but tasteful, about a decade behind the times - alot of early '70's avocado and wood paneling.

BEA (O.S.)

Mary? Is that you? What the hell  
you doing home so early?

Mary makes her way into the den where Bea, dressed in sweat pants and a T-shirt, eats cheese puffs and intently watches "Dance Fever" on a small TV. She tears herself away from the screen long enough to look Mary up and down.

BEA (CONT'D)

Oh my God, did you get sent home  
again?

MARY

Mom, I don't wanna hear it.

BEA

Of course you did. Honey, nice  
Jewish girls don't dress up like  
slutty Catholics. Thank God your  
grandmother is gone, I'd hate to  
think she survived three years in  
Auschwitz for  
(indicating Mary)  
*this.*

Mary turns and storms to her bedroom. She flicks the light switch -- the whole room is a Madonna shrine. Madonna posters cover every surface. Madonna figures and memorabilia are everywhere.

She walks to a small sewing table in the room and holds up a denim jacket. She looks at a picture on the wall of Madonna wearing an identical jacket with rips. Mary takes a pair of scissors and artfully rips her own jacket until it matches.

MARY

Damn, I'm good.

She then sits at a small desk and takes out a piece of stationary with "Think of Me" embossed on the top with a pair of shiny red lips. "Mary Tyler Moore" blares on her TV as she writes:

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

Dear Madonna, Thank you so much for the autographed 8 by 10 glossy of the original "Lucky Star" artwork you sent last week. I put it right on the ceiling over my bed where it belongs! Nothing's changed since I last wrote - my job at Maldor's still sucks! It gets me through the day knowing that you worked at a Dunkin' Donuts in NYC. But you weren't there for 6 years, like I am now. My God, am I a total fuckin' loser or what? Wish I could get the hell out of here like you did. But that's why you're you, right?

She pauses for a moment with her pen on her chin. She picks up a copy of "People" magazine with Madonna on the cover and absentmindedly flips through it. On the TV, Mary Tyler Moore spins and throws her hat up in the air.

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

Anyways, do you have a glossy from the "Like a Virgin" video? It's been so long since I've been one.

(she laughs)

I appreciate you always responding to my letters, you really have my back. I hope things are going well for you in New York. Sincerely,  
Mary.

Mary is lost in a moment of thought -- until the PHONE RINGS in the hallway.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'll get it!

Mary runs to the hall and picks up a mustard-yellow phone from an end table.

MARY (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hello?

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)

Uh, were you sent home early again?

MARY

(into phone)

How can you manage to annoy me from 90 miles away?

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)

How can you manage to be such a loser at 22? You're, like, four years older than me, and you can't even hold down a job at Maldor's!

MARY

(into phone)

Oh, I'm sorry I couldn't get a full scholarship to "Bernard" like *some* people.

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)

It's *Barnard*, dumb ass. Bernard's a goddamn dog. You've never even *been* to New York.

MARY

(into phone)

And on that note, I'll get mom.

Mary holds the receiver away from her body.

MARY (CONT'D)

Mom, it's your favorite daughter on the phone!

Mary looks down at the end table to a framed senior portrait of JAMIE. She looks like the mascot for the "Preppy Handbook."

BEA (O.S.)

Jamie! I haven't spoken to her in -- my God it must have been two days.

Bea walks over and snatches the phone out of Mary's hands.

BEA (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hi honey, how was the B'nai Brith meeting yesterday?

Mary rolls her eyes.

MARY

I'll be at Colleen's if you need me.

BEA

(into phone)

A Jewish Donny Osmond? Pre-med? Baby, that's wonderful!

Mary exits the trailer.

EXT. NEWBURGH STREETS - DAY

Mary's Toyota Tercel chugs along, its back bumper barely hanging on; affixed is a "MATERIAL GIRL" bumper sticker.

The car passes an ominous sign that reads "BRENTWAST FUNERAL HOME." ORGAN MUSIC sounds.

EXT. BRENTWAST FUNERAL HOME - CONTINUOUS

Mary mounts the steps of the ornate building and RINGS a large DOORBELL. Seconds later, a very dour looking YOUNG WOMAN about Mary's age opens the door. She is dressed in total 80's Goth gear: all black head to toe, black eyeliner, black fishnets, and black Doc Martins. Her hair is cut in a short black bob. Around her outfit is a white apron -- splattered with blood. She looks Mary up and down.

YOUNG WOMAN

It's only three, Mary. Did you get sent home early again?

MARY

Shut up, Colleen, and let me in.

COLLEEN (YOUNG WOMAN)

Okay, but (she indicates apron) I'm still working, hope you don't mind.

INT. BRENTWAST FUNERAL HOME - DAY

The back room: a large, antiseptic lab area. Mary reads a "People Magazine" at a card table while Colleen works on a corpse laid out on a metal slab. MUSIC by Siouxsie and the Banshees plays from Collen's BOOMBOX.

MARY

God, you're lucky you love your work.

COLLEEN

I am lucky, aren't I?

She pulls out an organ, cuts it from the corpse and puts it in a jar. She then takes out a Polaroid camera and takes a picture of it.

COLLEEN (CONT'D)

I just love the smell of formaldehyde in the morning. Family business or not, I gotta say work here is pretty fascinating.

(MORE)

COLLEEN (CONT'D)

You'd be surprised the social skills you need in the death business.

She puts a clear plastic tube into the corpse and blood drains from it into a metal bucket.

COLLEEN (CONT'D)

Where you want to go for drinks tonight?

MARY

You're joking, right? How many places do we have to choose from in this cesspool? You in the mood for the River Run or the Dogpound?

Colleen smears blood on her apron.

COLLEEN

I've been a naughty little bitch. The Dogpound it is. Gimme an hour.

INT. THE DOGPOUND - EVENING

A depressing, dank sports bar. Mary and Colleen sit in the back. A Mets game plays on the circuit televisions as an after-work crowd trickles in.

MARY

Why, why, *why* do we subject ourselves to this? Week after week?

COLLEEN

Maybe some interesting people will actually show up.

TWO MEN walk by the girls' table and smirk.

MAN #1

Hey Walt, the circus is in town.

MAN #2

Is it the circus or the county fair? Sooooooooooooo!

Mary and Colleen ignore the men as they pass.

MARY

This place bites. Anyone who was anybody, left this shitbag town after high school.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

At least at Maldor's I can smirk  
and feel superior.

COLLEEN

That's negative karma, babe. Wow,  
your self-esteem is like, totally  
in the toilet. I'm kind of  
surprised you were never knocked up  
in high school. You need validation  
in the worst way.

Two more MEN walk by the girls' table. Very drunk.

MAN #3

(to Mary)

You know you can see your bra  
straps, sweetheart? But it's okay,  
I don't mind.

Taking in Colleen's all black attire --

MAN #4

(drunkenly)

I'm so sorry for your loss.

Colleen grabs Man #4's crotch and produces a scalpel from  
work.

COLLEEN

And you'll be sorry for yours, too.  
I will slice your nuts, rip them  
off, and eat them for a midnight  
snack, you half-breed.

She lets go of Man #4 and the men quickly slink away.

MARY

Men just can't appreciate strong,  
independent women.

COLLEEN

The men in this town are dead-end,  
retarded degenerates. I need a man  
who looks like Sid Vicious and has  
the heart of Wayne Newton. But all  
this city has are fucking Bret  
Michaels. Come on.

The girls leave in a huff.

INT. MALDOR'S - NEXT DAY

The same long lines, same cashiers. At aisle number 11, Mary looks a little worse for the wear.

A teen boy ogles her as she rings up his purchase.

MARY

Poke your eyes back in your head  
before I do it for you, creeper.

Next in line is a MOTHER and five-year-old boy pushing a large shopping cart brimming with items. Mary absently takes each item out and rings them one by one.

CUT TO:

INT. MR. PICKLES' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Mr. Pickles watches Mary ring up the items on a closed circuit monitor screen in real time.

CUT TO:

INT. MALDOR'S - CONTINUOUS

Mary's register.

MARY

Okay, that'll be fifty-six seventy-five.

MOTHER

Are you *sure*?

MARY

Look at the screen thingy here, you think I can make this crap up on the spot?

INT. MALDOR'S - REGISTERS/ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS (SLOW MOTION)

The Mother hands Mary her payment, then grabs the shopping cart and pushes it towards the store entrance. Mr. Pickles frantically runs from his office to the front of the store and meets the Mother with the cart. He peers into the cart, shakes his head, and then shouts --

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