

The Substitute Wife

By
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CAST LIST

CLAIRE BENNETT
BRYCE WALTERS
LORAIN WALTERS
ASHFORD WATERS
CAROLINE WATERS
THIAGO
OFFICER
OFFICER 2
COOK
DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)
CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR)
BRYCE (FRANK SINATRA)
2ND ASSISTANT CAMERAMAN
FEMALE GUARD
BEULA

THE SUBSTITUTE WIFE

INT: THE BOARD ROOM OF WALTERS & WATERS

IN A SMOKY, MID CENTURY BOARD ROOM AT THE LAW OFFICES OF WALTERS & WATERS, 8 MEN ARE RAMBLING ON ABOUT THEIR RECENT COURT CASE.

They are proud and arrogant. Smoking cigars, having brandy. BRYCE hits the phone intercom on the conference table phone.

BRYCE

Claire could you bring us some more ice?

CLAIRE

Yes Mr. Walters.

CLAIRE ENTERS WITH THE ICE.

The men talk but view CLAIRE. They are like wolves. CLAIRE is very aware of this and plays up to the attention.

BRYCE

Ah Claire, so efficient. So handy!

ATTORNEY 1

Claire, do you have a sister? I need someone just like you.

ATTORNEY 2

You have nothing to offer. Claire, ignore him! I am the one you want.

ATTORNEY 3

Gentlemen if anyone is going to have Claire it will be/

CLAIRE

Attorneys. Please! A woman should be so lucky to have the attention of one man but a roomful, wolves!

The men all growl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

My goodness, what am I to do?

ALL

Say "yes"

BRYCE

Now, now, men settle down. Claire is mine.

ATTORNEY 1

Yours? Bryce you devil!

BRYCE

No. No, I mean Claire, reports to me. Now let's get back to our celebration. Claire, how long are you working this evening?

CLAIRE

Well, that's up to you Mr. Walters. My time is your time.

ATTORNEY 1

Brycie-boy you little Casanova

CLAIRE

No, I didn't mean it like that. I mean/

BRYCE

Claire if you could stay on for an extra hour, let me wrap up the meeting here with these men and then I have a few tasks for us to review.

CLAIRE

Very good, Mr. Walters.

CLAIRE exits. The men hoot and tease BRYCE

INT: OFFICE OF BRYCE

CLAIRE brings some file folders to the office of BRYCE. She notices a large portrait of LORAIN WALTERS toasting a glass of champagne. The photo is elegant. Loraine is the height of style and grace (think Jackie Kennedy). CLAIRE looks long at the photo and then "practices" imitating LORAIN. Talking in a high style voice and acting out like she is at a top-drawer dinner party.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Oh yes, thank you. Oh Paris, simply lovely this time of year. Oh yes, the yacht? Of course, Mitzi the yacht is Newport and of course we have one in the Hamptons...oh you don't have one there oh shame, really. Bob you flirt, well of course these diamonds are real. Bryce only buys me the best...oh yes Bryce is a love...Mitzi you should have a man like Bryce, except my Bryce is taken by me!

CLAIRE does a toast in the air and smiles.

INT: OUTSIDE OF BRYCE'S OFFICE/ THEN INSIDE THE OFFICE

Outside BRYCE'S office, we see (but do not hear) CLAIRE toasting, talking, and laughing. BRYCE walks up a sees this and smiles. He opens the door and catches CLAIRE off-guard. She is quickly embarrassed.

CLAIRE

Oh, Mr. Walters, i was just

BRYCE

Claire no bother. I loved watching you do whatever it was that you were doing.

CLAIRE

Nothing, sir.

BRYCE

Well you certainly had a lot of drama going on for nothing? Now tell me what where you doing?

CLAIRE

Well, nothing, really. I used to be an actress in my high school back in New Haven and

BRYCE

Oh I love New Haven. Such good working class people there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

And I saw and I love that rather large picture here on the wall of Mrs. Walters. She looks so lovely toasting to some crowd.

BRYCE

Oh yes, that was from the Gala with Ike.

CLAIRE

Ike?

BRYCE

Ike. The president, Dwight D Eisenhower .

CLAIRE

Oh, my that must have been marvelous. Who was there?

BRYCE

Billy Robinson was there, Clifford Roberts, Mamie of course and others.

CLAIRE

Did they like Mrs. Walters?

BRYCE

No.

CLAIRE

I have heard she can be a little stiff.

BRYCE

What? Ike and the gang, love Lolly. She is the life of the party.

CLAIRE

Lolly?

BRYCE

Lorraine, my wife. My pet name for her is Lolly.

CLAIRE

Oh I am sorry I didn't mean to call her

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BRYCE

Stiff? It's ok. She can be aloof. She travels a lot, always takes herself. If she can drive there she will. I have told her to let Thiago drive here but she will not stand for it. Always driving herself to our other house up in the mountains. She is so independent.

CLAIRE

Children?

BRYCE

Pardon me?

CLAIRE

I noticed that there are no pictures of you both with children.

BRYCE turns and is quiet. His mood has changed.

BRYCE

Yes, children.

CLAIRE

I mean you both are young and active and

BRYCE

And we can't.

CLAIRE

Can't?

BRYCE

Can't. We tried but Lolly is not able. She is very distant about all of it. I would love a child. She gave up on it all a few years ago.

CLAIRE

I am sorry. That must be hard.

BRYCE unexpectedly turns and kisses CLAIRE. Like passion out of anguish. A long deep passionate kiss. They break and BRYCE says breathlessly

BRYCE

My God. I have wanted to do that for months.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BRYCE (CONT'D)

I have dreamt about it, thought about it, fantasized hours over that kiss.

CLAIRE

Mr. Walters, I am speechless.

BRYCE

And it was more wonderful than I hoped it would be. Realty surpassed my fantasy!

CLAIRE

I am

BRYCE moves in and kisses CLAIRE again. She returns his kiss. They move to the top of his desk and (like in "The postman always rings twice" push everything off the desk and have immediate, passionate sex.) The scene fades to B&W and we never see the exposed breasts of CLAIRE. We do see the bare ass of Bryce who is in fine shape. This scene fades.

Some time later the scene starts in B&W. CLAIRE is wearing the Dress shirt of BRYCE. They are in BRYCE'S off. This is just after the love scene on the desk. BRYCE is shirtless and glistening sweat off his chiseled, mid-30's body. CLAIRE walks to get a drink. BRYCE gets up and from behind turns her around and kisses her. As they kiss the scene goes to color. The thunder claps and heavy rain starts.

CLAIRE

So?

BRYCE

Again?

CLAIRE

Mr Walters?

BRYCE

Hmm you called me a different name just a little while ago.

CLAIRE

What name?

BRYCE

Sweet Jesus! Oh My God!

CLAIRE

Oh you are going to make this girl blush.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

BRYCE
Well, is that ok?

CLAIRE
So?

BRYCE
So?

CLAIRE
So what happens next?

BRYCE
Let's just stay in this moment.

CLAIRE
A girl needs more than just moments.

BRYCE growls playfully and picks up CLAIRE and the collapse on the couch both laughing and giggling.

THE SCENE FADES TO B&W AS THE BODIES ENTWINE AND FADE TO MORPHED MOVEMENTS.

INT: THE STUDY AT THE WALTERS ESTATE

LORAINNE, CAROLINE and THIAGO are at the Walters mansion. It is mid-day and a loud thunderclap is heard and the rain falls hard.

THIAGO
Miss Loraine, shall I close the windows?

LORAINNE
No, Thiago, leave them open. We need to get some air moving through this house.

CAROLINE
Loraine, the water will damage the veranda.

LORAINNE
It's just wicker, it's meant to get wet. Thiago, I am heading up the other house shortly. Could you have a sandwich made for me? Make it two, I may not be back for dinner.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE

Lolly, in this weather?

LORAINNE

Oh Caroline, it's just thunder and rain. I'll be fine. I have some work to do and I cannot think while I am here in this stuffy old house.

CAROLINE

House? More like estate!

THIAGO

Miss Loraine, are you sure you want to head up there now.

LORAINNE

Oh, Thiago, you worry too much! I will be fine. If you could get those sandwiches ready for me that would be great. Just a little bit of mayo and mustard on the bread.

THIAGO

Miss Loraine, I know by now how you like your sandwiches.

LORAINNE

Thiago you take such good care of me.

THIAGO exits.

CAROLINE

Lolly, what is it that you are working on? What is the burning issue?

LORAINNE

Burning issue? No, I have begun writing again. I took a break there for a while and

CAROLINE

And does all of that still bother you? Poor dear.

LORAINNE

Well I wanted a child, but it was just not in the cards. I was dealt the Aces and that did not give me a winning hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CAROLINE

Lolly, you could try again?

LORAINÉ

Caroline, 4 miscarriages in 4 years. No, I cannot go through that again.

The thunders cracks loudly and CAROLINE jumps and gives a little scream. The lights go out. LORAINÉ is not effected.

LORAINÉ

Oh, Caroline, you are acting like a 5-year old. My heavens. It is just thunder. Feel that breeze! Oh isn't that the most wonderful feeling? And the scent, oh I love the smell of fresh rain.

CAROLINE

How you can not even jump when that thunder claps like that is beyond my thinking. I just don't understand how/

LORAINÉ

How I love the thunder. How I love a cool night, a hot day, a sad movie, sand between my toes and fresh baked bread?

CAROLINE

Yes all of that! And how you drive yourself everywhere. You have Thiago. You have an entire staff ready and willing to wait on you and/

LORAINÉ

And I have always been taught to take care of myself and those around me.

CAROLINE

How is Bryce?

LORAINÉ

Bryce is wonderful.

CAROLINE

No I mean since you, well since you both can't have children?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LORAINÉ

I can't have children. Bryce can.
Bryce is fine.

CAROLINE

Really? That's what you think?

LORAINÉ

Yes, that is what I think. What
do you know? Or have you been
gossiping again with those
dreadful trophy wives. They bore
me. Never an original thought of
their own.

CAROLINE

And all those men seem to have
another one on the side. Like a
substitute.

LORAINÉ

What did you just say? Say that
again.

Lorraine goes to a table and picks up her journal where
she keeps thoughts and ideas.

CAROLINE

What? That men have one on the
side? They are so bold about it.

LORAINÉ

No, no, after that! What did you
call those other women?

CAROLINE

Substitute.

LORAINÉ

That's it. The Substitute Wife.
Yes!

LORAINÉ quickly writes that down. She hugs CAROLINE and
says the phrase now with conviction. You can see her
mind swirling with ideas.

LORAINÉ

The Substitute Wife. Perfect.
Caroline you are a genius!

CAROLINE

Well it is nothing special.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

LORAINÉ

Oh it is! You just gave me a whole book of ideas!

CAROLINE

Ok, I never got your writing. All of those ideas that come from nowhere. Your little book of thoughts.

LORAINÉ

Caroline my dear friend. Do not diminish my book by calling it "little." The little book gave us "Fatal Infidelity" and "Shadows of Betrayal." We wouldn't be in this house if it wasn't for those two novels.

CAROLINE

Yes they were wonderful!

LORAINÉ

Oh Caroline, you didn't even read them!

LORAINÉ and CAROLINE laugh.

CAROLINE

Well I did!

LORAINÉ

Ok how did "Shadows of Betrayal" end? Hmmm, love?

CAROLINE

Well, it was very tragic.

LORAINÉ

Tragic! Margaret had no other choice but to jump from the cliff as her life had withered away in front of her.

CAROLINE cries silently, now filled with emotion. A moment of silence.

CAROLINE

Yes that ending was so very sad.

LORAINÉ

Oh you cheat! That was not the ending!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

LORAINE (CONT'D)

Margaret shot her lying husband dead, made it look like self-defense and got off and got everything! I knew you didn't read it!

CAROLINE

Well, your books are always a little dark. Like that odd woman, what is her name? Shannon? Cullen? O'Malley?

LORAINE

O'Connor. Flannery O'Connor. "Wise Blood" just great.

CAROLINE

No. No and no. Too dark. Too messy. I like a good romance novel.

LORAINE

I could get you the "Better Homes and Gardens Cookbook."

CAROLINE

No! If Ashford knew I could cook he would fire the maids!

LORAINE

Exactly. That is what I am talking about. You, my dear friend are entitled.

CAROLINE

Lolly Walters I am not "Entitled." I am "enriched."

LORAINE

Ok let's leave it at that, you are "enriched." Now I have got to get going before the day runs away from me.

CAROLINE

Lolly, can I just take one more minute.

LORAINE

Caroline, sure what is the issue!

CAROLINE

Bryce. I think Bryce...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

LORAINÉ

What?

CAROLINE

Well, Ashford said that...

LORAINÉ

Caroline out with it. I won't break. My heart is not made of glass.

CAROLINE

I think Bryce has a Substitute Wife.

LORAINÉ

Nonsense. Caroline you are trying to get a rise out of me. You wicked, women. It's like we are back to being 15 and you would tease me about the boys who liked me.

CAROLINE

Well, this time it's true.

LORAINÉ

Bryce? A Substitute Wife. Nonsense! I am off. Dear show your self out. I am going to pick up my sandwiches and get to the mountain house and work!

LORAINÉ goes out. CAROLINE is left in her thoughts. The Lights come back on. The Thunder bangs and the lights go off again. Rain comes down heavier than ever. The scene fades to B&W. CAROLINE yells out.

CAROLINE

Thiago! Thiago!

THE SCENE FADES.

INT: FRONT ENTRANCE TO WALTERS ESTATE/STUDY

5pm. Thunder rolling, lightning, and heavy rain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE AND CLAIRE ARE IN BRYCE'S RED CORVETTE AND PULL UP TO THE WALTER'S ESTATE.

CLAIRE in a skirt and heels. They get out and dash into the Walter's estate, soaked to the bone. They enter dripping wet, laughing as they do so and THIAGO is there to greet them at the entrance.

THIAGO

Mr. Bryce! Soaked to bone! You know you have a tenacity for colds. What am I going to do with you?

BRYCE

Oh, Thiago, you are always watching over me. I will, well we will take 2 glasses of brandy. I am going to need to change and could you get Claire some clothes.

THIAGO

Sir how long is the lady staying?

BRYCE

When is Lolly, returning?

THIAGO

Mrs. Walters did not say. She had me make her a sandwich for dinner.

BRYCE

Perfect then she won't be back for hours. Claire, Thiago will get you settled. I will see you shortly.

BRYCE exits. THIAGO gives CLAIRE the "once-over" and is not amused. CLAIRE is hesitant and tentative at first. She is observing everything.

BRYCE

Connie, is it?

CLAIRE

Claire.

CLAIRE extends her hand for a handshake. THIAGO does not reciprocate. Awkward moment.

CLAIRE

Claire. The name is Claire.
Claire Bennett.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

THIAGO

Yes. Bennett. And you are?

CLAIRE

Claire.

THIAGO

Young woman, I know your name. You've made that clear. How did you find yourself in Mr. Walter's corvette? Hitchhiker? Stranded by the side of the road. Flash your legs?

CLAIRE now stiffens and takes back control. Putting THIAGO in his place as a servant to BRYCE.

CLAIRE

Hitchhiker? Thiago, I am Bryce's personal assistant. I attend to his needs.

THIAGO

Young woman, let me be clear that I attend to Mr. Walter's needs.

CLAIRE

Well, Bryce has needs that only I can attend to. Now show me where to change.

THIAGO looks coolly.

THIAGO

This way, madam.

INT: LORAINÉ'S BEDROOM

THEY GO UPSTAIRS TO THE BEDROOM OF LORAINÉ WALTERS. ON THE WAY THEY PASS PORTRAITS AND PICTURES OF LORAINÉ. ONE PHOTO HAS LORAINÉ SHAKING HANDS WITH A MAN AND HER BOOK IN HAND "SHADOWS OF BETRAYAL." CLAIRE STOPS AND LOOKS.

CLAIRE

What is this?

THIAGO

Oh, our Miss Lorainé is quite the writer. That's her acceptance of the Pulitzer Prize for her novel "Shadows of Betrayal."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

That novel. Jesus what a sleeper.
I couldn't stay awake. Too many
pages.

THIAGO

Those pages, young lady, paid for
the steps you are standing on.
For the house you are in as a
guest.

CLAIRE

Well, no accounting for taste. I
didn't like. Now can we get me
out of these clothes?

THIAGO ENTERS THE BEDROOM OF LORAINÉ. A ROOM WITH A VIEW
AND A INDEPENDENT CHANGING ROOM, BATHROOM. IT SHOULD
FEEL REFINED.

THIAGO gives a look up and down at CLAIRE.

THIAGO

Interesting. I suspect you are her
size.

CLAIRE

Who?

THIAGO

Mrs. Walters of course.

THIAGO takes out a simple blouse and pants, under
garments and lays them gently with reverence on the bed.

THIAGO

You may want to dry off and
freshen up. Will you be staying
for dinner?

CLAIRE

I am not sure.

THIAGO

I will let Cook know you are
staying. Don't want her to have a
bee in her bonnet over unannounced
guests. How will you be getting
home?

CLAIRE

I am not sure.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

THIAGO

Hmmm. Seems you are not sure about most things. Anything you are sure about, Connie?

CLAIRE

Claire. My name is Claire. Are you always this dim, or are you smitten with me and can't seem to focus? What I am sure about is that I need you to leave so I can get dressed.

THIAGO looks at CLAIRE and raises an eyebrow. He leaves. CLAIRE looks around the room. Fantasizes about being LORAINÉ. She takes the clothes set at for her by THIAGO and dismisses them and tosses them on the floor. She goes into the other room and we see an entire store of clothes and shoes and accessories. CLAIRE is stunned.

CLAIRE

Who knew writing such a shitty novel could get you all of this. Maybe I will try my hand at writing. How hard can it be? Give me a good Marilyn Monroe movie any day.

THE CAMERA GOES TO B&W.

CLAIRE finds a slinky black jumpsuit and smiles. Passing by the jewelry she snags a strand of pearls and puts those on. She sees a photo of LORAINÉ with her hair in a French Twist. She passes by the perfume area and spies the Chanel #5. She picks it up and smiles.

THIS SCENE FADES AS CLAIRE HUMS A TUNE TO HERSELF. THE THUNDER AND RAIN RAGE ON OUTSIDE.

A while later Bryce is in the study. THIAGO brings in two glasses of Brandy. BRYCE lights a Cuban cigar.

BRYCE

Thiago, where is Miss Bennett?

THIAGO

Is she staying for dinner? I told Cook so she wouldn't

BRYCE

Get a bee in her bonnet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

They both laugh.

BRYCE

Yes, she will be here often I believe. I spend too much time at work and I thought I would do some work at home for a change.

THIAGO

So, Miss Bennett.

BRYCE

Claire. Thiago, use her first name.

THIAGO

Claire, yes sir. Will Claire be here more often?

BRYCE

Yes. Is that a problem?

THIAGO

No sir, not at all.

BRYCE

When in the name of God will she be ready. What is she doing?

CLAIRE enters looking very much like LORAINÉ. Her hair up in a French twist. She glides in like royalty. She picks up the other glass of brandy and turns to THIAGO. She waives him off.

CLAIRE

That will be all, Thiago. Give us 15 minute call before dinner as Bryce and I have work to do.

THIAGO Looks puzzled. BRYCE smiles.

CLAIRE

Did I stutter? Bryce, Thiago thought that I was a hitchhiker that you took kindness on during the rain. Isn't that right, Thiago?

BRYCE

Oh, Thiago, always stirring things up. Ok Thiago I will call if I need you. Let's hold dinner till 745.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

THIAGO

Oh Sir, but Cook had dinner
planned for 6. She will be

BRYCE

Just fine with that. Thank you,
Thiago.

THIAGO shakes his head and mutters "dinner at 745...Cook
Will kill me..."

BRYCE

Well, didn't you polish up nicely?
And pearls? You travel with your
own set of pearls?

CLAIRE

Well, they were hers so I put them
on.

BRYCE

My dear, they "are" hers. Loraine
is not dead.

CLAIRE

Yet.

BRYCE

What?

CLAIRE

Oh Bryce, relax, just teasing.
Come here.

CLAIRE pulls BRYCE in for a kiss. BRYCE indulges and as
they kiss he notices the Chanel #5.

BRYCE

Oh I see (he kisses her neck) that
you travel with your own Chanel
No. 5. Where did you store that?

CLAIRE

Bryce, make love to me here.

CLAIRE turns her back to the camera and drops the black
clothing to floor. BRYCE'S face is one of passion and
excitement. He moans and picks up CLAIRE and places her on
the couch. The Lightning strikes, thunder rolls, and
the rain rages on. The camera goes to B&W as BRYCE and
CLAIRE moan and make love. The scene fades.

INT: ONE WEEK LATER IN LORAINÉ'S BEDROOM

LORAINÉ is getting ready for a publicity event for her novel. She Calls out to BRYCE.

LORAINÉ

Bryce, have you seen my pearls? I saw them last week and now I cannot seem to find them?

BRYCE

Well if you saw them, then they must be here. Did you put them in your room at the other house?

LORAINÉ

Not that I know of. You haven't seen them?

BRYCE

Well I did wear them out to my board meeting two nights ago.

LORAINÉ

Oh you! Such a comedian. Well no matter. I will put on the black onyx. What do you think, too dark?

BRYCE

Too dark for the woman that wrote "Shadows of Betrayal" I think you are all set. You look wonderful.

LORAINÉ

And I must be losing my mind, I cannot find my Chanel No 5. I had an entire bottle.

BRYCE

Maybe when Fiona was cleaning she moved it?

LORAINÉ

I will stop and get another bottle tomorrow. I have to go into town anyway, another book signing. I really want to get to work on my newest idea.

BRYCE

Oh what is it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LORAINÉ

You know I never share details
till I am finished.

BRYCE

Yes dear!

LORAINÉ

I have to get going. I am picking
up Caroline and Ashford. Are you
sure you don't want to join us?

BRYCE

No I have work to do here, you go.
When will you be home?

LORAINÉ

I won't be home tonight. I am
going up the other house
afterwards, I have work to do
there. Cook said she will be sure
to feed you.

BRYCE

Lolly you know I love your Turkey
Divan.

LORAINÉ

That is the problem being a 1950's
housewife: make exciting meals,
keep the home smelling lemon fresh
and always look appealing for
their husbands, and make it all
look easy!

BRYCE

That's why we have a staff!

LORAINÉ

Yes, but I was raised

BRYCE & LORAINÉ

Not to let anyone do what I could
do myself.

They both laugh. LORAINÉ kisses BRYCE on the cheek and
leaves.

BRYCE PICKS UP THE PHONE AND CALLS CLAIRE.

BRYCE

What are you doing?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

Nothing, Boss man what do you need?

BRYCE

I will send the car over to get you. We have work to do.

CLAIRE

At this hour on a Friday? What should I wear?

BRYCE

The pearls. Just the pearls.

CLAIRE

Oh you wicked man.

They hang up.

BRYCE

Thiago, have the car sent to pick up Miss Bennett. Have COOK make the Beef Stroganoff.

Thunder rolls and the lightening strikes.

BRYCE

Damn rain, again.

EXT: B&W AS LORAINÉ PULLS UP TO AN UPSCALE APARTMENT BUILDING AND VALET PARKS THE CAR.

She is at the apartment of CAROLINE and ASHFORD Waters. Heavy Rain. The rain does not dampen the spirits of LORAINÉ, it is as if she enjoys the weather. LORAINÉ hands the keys to the valet and tips him. She walks into the posh lobby. Goes to the elevator and up to the penthouse suite of CAROLINE and ASHFORD. LORAINÉ is as effortless as Jackie Kennedy when Camelot went down in flames.

INT: ASHFORD PENTHOUSE

As LORAINÉ gets off the elevator, CAROLINE is there to greet her. Warm hugs.

CAROLINE

Lolly, I don't understand why you don't let your staff drive you. I know I know

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE & LORAINÉ

I like to be in control.

They laugh

CAROLINE

Sweetie we must talk.

ASHFORD comes out to usher the ladies into the apartment

ASHFORD

My two favorite dames!

Singing from "South Pacific"

CAROLINE & LORAINÉ

"There is nothing like a dame"

ASHFORD

See! Marvelous. You two should have been on the silver screen! Now come inside for a quick drink. I made a batch of my Vesper Martinis

LORAINÉ

I love that Ian Fleming book "Casino Royal." I could picture that as a movie one day.

ASHFORD

Lolly, maybe one of your own novels. I think your current work "Shadows of Betrayal" would be great with Randolph Scott or Jimmy Stewart.

LORAINÉ

Ash, you work on that contract for me!

ASHFORD pours up the Vesper Martinis and they toast.

ASHFORD & CAROLINE

To "Shadows of Betrayal!"

CAROLINE

Now, Lolly, come sit for a moment.

LORAINÉ

Ok just a moment we do have to get to this event.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ASHFORD

No worries, Lolly, I will have our driver get us there in plenty of time.

LORAINÉ

Now, Ash, you know I don't mind driving.

ASHFORD

Lolly, it is all set, now we need a word with you.

LORAINÉ

Ok. What's wrong, you are both ok? Is someone sick?

CAROLINE

No, Lolly, no. Now you know we love and Bryce.

LORAINÉ

Cut to the chase. What's the damage?

ASHFORD

Straight shooters are rare these days. I always loved that about you, Lolly.

LORAINÉ

So?

CAROLINE

Bryce.

LORAINÉ

What's wrong with Bryce.

CAROLINE

He's having an affair.

LORAINÉ

Please. That news doesn't rattle my cage. Who is it today?

CAROLINE

You knew?

LORAINÉ

Yes, I had the inside track. Welcome to the real story.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ASHFORD

The "Real story?"

LORAINNE

Life dealt us a different hand so we play a different game.

CAROLINE

What are you saying?

LORAINNE

I am saying that we are going to be late for this event. Let's not worry over worries that don't matter.

CAROLINE

Lolly, you are so cavalier about this.

LORAINNE

Ash, did you call for the car. Life is a tough racket at times, and I will, we will all pull through

THE CAMERA FADES TO B&W AS THEY HAVE A FINAL SIP OF THEIR VESPER.

LORAINNE is untouched by the conversation. CAROLINE is uneasy and ASHFORD is not sure what to make of it. LORAINNE leads the way arm-and-arm with Caroline. The rain and thunder crackle and light up the night sky.

INT: WALTERS ESTATE, THE STUDY

Back at the WALTERS estate. A car pulls up in the downpour. The driver gets out with an umbrella and opens the back seat door. CLAIRE steps out in a raincoat, heels and pearls. Her hair is covered. She is escorted into the estate. THIAGO is waiting for her inside the estate. THIAGO is politely cool. CLAIRE is coolly polite.

THIAGO

Miss Bennett, look what the cat dragged in.

CLAIRE

A girl's got to keep you guessing, darling. Keeps things interesting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THIAGO

Yes I see you have "High Society"
written all over you.

CLAIRE

Bryce sees me differently

THIAGO

I have found that what's inside
the house usually watches the
outside décor.

CLAIRE

Shouldn't you be doing something
rather than undressing me with
those eyes. You should learn the
subtle art of envy.

THIAGO

Those pearls are very lovely. How
did you come by such elegance?
They look familiar.

CLAIRE

Let's say I have a few side
hustles, so keep the lights on but
low.

THIAGO

Yes low lighting suits your
present intentions.

CLAIRE

My, God, man, come off it. I'll
have to let Bryce know your
behavior.

THIAGO

Oh Miss Black Widow, Bryce is very
well aware of my behavior.

BRYCE enters. Takes command

BRYCE

Thiago, you didn't tell me that
Miss Bennett arrived.

THIAGO

Oh just a moment ago. We were
just catching up. She is so
fascinating. So deep. Such a

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BRYCE

Thiago, that will do. Please tell Cook, that we will have dinner at 9 in the Library.

THIAGO

Very good, Sir. Miss Bennett I do hope to spend more time with you in the future to learn more about your "side hustles." So interesting.

BRYCE

Yes, Thiago, I am sure you and Miss Bennett will get to know each other well.

THIAGO

Oh I do look forward to that.

THIAGO leaves. CLAIRE is indifferent.

CLAIRE

The help. When they get ideas that they are the ones in charge, it all goes to shit.

BRYCE

My dear, Claire. Did Thiago upset you?

CLAIRE

No. The simple and dimwitted people have nothing to offer me and nothing to stab me with. Words. They just use words to create an illusion of interest when they are not at all interesting. One day I will be the one calling the orders. Let him and people like him have all the disdain they want towards me. They all say I'm tarnished and that may be true and I know what I am and what I want.

BRYCE

My, my! I have a tiger on my hands.

CLAIRE

Darling when we are together it is like we are rewriting the script to love.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BRYCE

Claire I have a proposition for you.

CLAIRE

Mr. Walters? A proposition? Well, it looks like you have a way with words but actions will speak much louder to me. What is the story we will write, together?

BRYCE

I want to have a baby. Lolly can't and I want a child.

CLAIRE

Poor thing. She may have deep roots but no fruit on her tree for my Bryce.

BRYCE

Let's have a child.

CLAIRE

Kids always seem to stir up trouble. They seem to have a knack for it.

BRYCE

Would you have my child.

CLAIRE

Having the kid is easy. It will be the maintenance that will be costly. I am not fond of "little people."

BRYCE

You've had children?

CLAIRE

Well I came close a few times. I came within an inch but, the bullseye slipped away.

BRYCE

So will you have my child?

CLAIRE

Well there seems to be a few issues on the table.

BRYCE

Money? Not a problem.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CLAIRE

No it's not the money, you will
pay me handsomely for my efforts.
It's just

BRYCE

What? What else.

CLAIRE

I want it all.

BRYCE

All?

CLAIRE

Everything. The name. The ring.
The servants. The car. Ike.
Newport. Paris. All of it.

BRYCE

My dear, all of that is no
problem.

CLAIRE

Just One thing. One itty bitty
thing.

BRYCE

Yes?

CLAIRE

Leave her.

CLAIRE turns her back to the camera. She is wearing the raincoat, heels and pearls. She opens the raincoat and lets it drop to the floor revealing her fully naked body except the pearls and heels. BRYCE looks and breathes in deep. He goes to speak and CLAIRE puts her finger on his lips to hush him.

CLAIRE

Well you did say we had business
to attend to. Oh wait, i missed
something.

BRYCE give a low growl.

BRYCE

Perfect.

CLAIRE

Details. It's all about the
details. You said the dress code
was "just pearls."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

CLAIRE steps out of the heels.

CLAIRE

Now I am ready to work. Where shall we start boss?

THE CAMERA GOES TO B&W AS BRYCE PICKS UP CLAIRE.

She wraps her legs around him and they twirl. Outside the thunder and lightening rage on. The couple falls onto the couch, then the floor. CLAIRE is never exposed. BRYCE takes off his shirt and pants and they make love there on the floor. The baby has just been conceived.

THIAGO SEES THIS ENTIRE SCENE.

THIAGO

She is just a dame with a Bargain basement soul.

THE SCENE FADES.

EXT: WALTERS ESTATE 4 MONTHS LATER - SUMMER, 10AM

LORAINNE and BRYCE are having coffee on the outside deck. THIAGO is pouring the coffee.

LORAINNE

Bryce it would just be for a few months. I could use the help.

THIAGO

More coffee, Miss Lolly?

LORAINNE

Yes, thank you. Now Bryce, your girl what is her name? Connie, Shelly, Karen?

THIAGO

Claire, Miss Lolly. Claire Bennett.

LORAINNE

Yes! Claire. I did meet her at the dreadful event you had last month, oh the guest list was so pretentious.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE

Now, now, Lolly, let's not judge.

THIAGO

Bargain Basement.

BRYCE

Thiago!

LORAININE

Bargain Basement? Thiago what does that mean?

THIAGO

Nothing, Miss Lolly, I mis-spoke.

LORAININE

Quit feeding me lines, just lay it on straight.

THIAGO

Ok, no smoke and mirrors. I get a bad feeling about her, Miss Lolly.

LORAININE

Bryce what do you think?

BRYCE

Look, Miss Bennett is a hard worker, on point and keeps me organized.

LORAININE

Perfect. That is what I want. Can you send her up to the Mountain house tomorrow so I can get her up to speed. Just for a few months. I am buried with the fan mail, the contracts and my new novel.

THIAGO

A new novel, Miss Lolly. Oh we love when you have a new novel! What is this one about.

BRYCE

Now, Thiago, you know our Miss Lolly won't divulge even a line on a page until it is ready.

LORAININE

That is correct. So Bryce, tomorrow at 10, please have Connie

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BRYCE

Claire!

LORAINNE

Pardon me, I mean "Claire" come up to the mountain house at 10am to meet me. We will work till about 5. Then I will be off to the meeting and book signing in San Diego. I will stay down there tomorrow night and be back on Monday.

BRYCE

Another night away? What will I do with myself?

LORAINNE

Treat Connie

BRYCE

Claire!

LORAINNE

Yes, "Claire" to dinner to say thank you. That would be nice.

BRYCE

What would we talk about?

THIAGO raises an eyebrow and BRYCE acknowledges this.

BRYCE

Well I guess we could talk about "Bargain Basements."

PAUSE they all look and then laugh. LORAINNE takes out her pad and writes in the phrase "Bargain Basement."

LORAINNE

Oh, Bryce, such a tease!

BRYCE

What are you writing down?

LORAINNE

I loved the thought of a "Bargain Basement" girl, great visuals. I may be able to use that. Ok, I am off. Please, Bryce, get your girl to agree to work with me for just a few months.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BRYCE

OK I will give her a call.

LORAINNE

Such a love.

LORAINNE gives Bryce a kiss on the cheek and she leaves.
THIAGO Raises an eyebrow and glances to BRYCE.

THIAGO

Sir.

BRYCE

Thiago, I know. Have the car sent to pick up Miss Bennett for 4pm and bring her here.

THIAGO

Sir, if I may

BRYCE

Thiago, I know. This is messy. I will clean this up.

THE SCENE GOES TO B&W. BRYCE CALLS CLAIRE.

BRYCE

Claire, new assignment for you. I'll send the car to pick you up for 330. Pearls? No just were clothes this time.

THE SCENE FADES.

INT: 4 PM IN THE STUDY AT WALTER'S ESTATE.

B&W AS THE THUNDER ROLLS, NO RAIN AT THE MOMENT.

Bryce is pacing. CLAIRE enters and gives a big kiss to BRYCE. He kisses her quickly and then paces.

CLAIRE

Bryce, I thought you would be happy to see me.

BRYCE

I am, we have to work out something. New assignment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

I have a knack for making things happen, if you know what I mean.

BRYCE

You are going to work for Loraine for a few months, be her assistant.

CLAIRE

Dance with the devil? Are you sure you want that.

BRYCE

She needs help and she asked for you, specifically.

CLAIRE

But what about our work, I don't want you to forget about me.

BRYCE

Forget about you. How could I

CLAIRE

I should mention that there is bread in the oven?

BRYCE

What? Pregnant?

CLAIRE

Maybe? That depends.

BRYCE

Well with you are or you're not. Which is it?

CLAIRE

Don't get too comfortable, darling. I've got options, and you might not make the final cut.

BRYCE

Wait so are you or aren't you?

CLAIRE

Well I am now, but that depends on who I am later.

BRYCE

Meaning?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

Bryce, honey, I made it very plain
that I do want it all.

BRYCE

But remember we have that problem.

CLAIRE

Well, seems like I am the new
assistant to the problem so

BRYCE

What are you saying, Claire?

CLAIRE

I am not sure yet, but you leave
the problem to me. As long as I
get everything I asked for you
will get what you want.

A loud clap of thunder is heard. The lights go out. The scene goes to B&W. BRYCE pulls CLAIRE in for a kiss. THIAGO opens the door and sees the kiss. BRYCE has his back and cannot see him. CLAIRE looks at THIAGO dead on and winks and smiles. THIAGO looks with a cold determination. CLAIRE waives her hand to shoo THIAGO out. He closes the door. The rain falls hard. BRYCE picks up CLAIRE.

BRYCE

We are going to have a baby.

SCENE FADES.

SUNDAY AT THE MOUNTAIN ESTATE. SUNNY. 9:45 AM.

LORAINÉ is having coffee looking out at the view. She is dressed effortlessly and casually as if she were Jackie Kennedy on a Sunday in Newport, RI. There is a knock on the front door. She goes to answer and CLAIRE is there dressed in a business suit for work. CLAIRE offers a firm business handshake as she enters. LORAINÉ is pleased by the take charge attitude.

LORAINÉ

You must be Claire? Come in.

CLAIRE has already shaken hands and entered.

CLAIRE

Mrs. Walters, nice to see you
again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LORAINÉ

Lolly. Call me Lolly. And I am sorry that my husband did not tell you about the dress code. We are away from the crowds. I work very comfortably and casually. So, tomorrow a pair of slacks and blouse is fine. Do bring a sweater as the air can be a bit breezy and cooler up here.

CLAIRE

Yes, Lolly, very good.

LORAINÉ

Thank you for taking on this task. I have a lot to get done and I need you to be in lock-step with me. I keep things easy and I expect you to take full reign of the work. Will that work for you?

CLAIRE

I am sure once you show me what you want I can take it from there.

LORAINÉ

As I have heard. You are a take-charge woman. I like that. Bryce says you do a lot for him.

CLAIRE

Yes I make sure he has everything that he needs.

LORAINÉ

He spends a lot of time with you. He seems so much more productive these last few months. Thank you for that.

CLAIRE

Anything I can do to help, I will do.

LORAINÉ

Bryce seems to be spending a lot of time at home these days. I've heard that you work at the house at times with him.

CLAIRE

Your home is lovely. I wish I had a place like that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LORAINÉ

Three words.

CLAIRE

Three words?

LORAINÉ

To get what you want: Magic.
Miraculous. Limitless.

CLAIRE

I don't understand.

LORAINÉ

You said you want a house like mine. I am assuming a life like mine. (she laughs) You want to step in my shoes and have the ring, the name, the husband, everything

CLAIRE

Well, yes.

LORAINÉ

Magic. Look for and believe that there is energy and surprises all around you. Miraculous. Believe and say to yourself, "I see my future." Limitless. Ask for what you want. The universe cannot read your mind.

CLAIRE

It's that simple?

LORAINÉ

No! Work. This all takes work and I assure that if you see the life you want and express it and talk about it and work towards it, things will happen.

CLAIRE

You make it sound so easy, to be you.

LORAINÉ

Honey (she laughs easy), well I can only be me. You can only be you. Can I say one more thing and then we must get to work.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CLAIRE

Ok, what is it that you want to say.

LORAINNE

My father always said, "Never rise to power on the backs of others. Your success should be determined by your work and your efforts."

CLAIRE

Interesting. I am going to think on that one.

LORAINNE

Ok then let's get to work. Oh and I do not keep a staff here at this house, it is just me most of the time. There is plenty of food and beverages so always help yourself. If there is something that you need let me know. Ready for your first assignment?

CLAIRE

Yes, let's get to it.

LORAINNE goes to the desk where there is a large bundle of letters (Several hundred). CLAIRE gasps slightly.

LORAINNE

These are from the past 3 weeks. Mail. We need to sort these into 4 categories: Thank you; Budding Writer; When and what is your next novel; Can we meet? Separate these into those categories to be ready for a response. Any questions?

CLAIRE

I am a quick study. I got it

FADE TO B&W AS CLAIRE GETS WORKING TO SIFT THE LETTERS INTO PILES.

Later that afternoon. Thunder rolling and heavy rain. CLAIRE looking out to view the road going down the mountain and the steepness and the turns.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CLAIRE

Look at that road. Treacherous.
Without breaks a car could go
right off the road.

LORAINNE enters on the last line.

LORAINNE

Claire who are you talking to?

CLAIRE

Oh I was looking at the view and
thought that the road down the
mountain must be dangerous.

LORAINNE

I know that road in my sleep. Ok
take out a blank piece of paper
from the desk drawer and have a
seat. I now need you to sign the
letters with my signature. I have
a rather distinctive cursive
signature.

LORAINNE shows her signature that has an expressive "L"
The camera shows her signature across the screen.

LORAINNE

Ok now I would like you to
practice my signature several
times to get it correct. You will
see there are 4 bins there with
the appropriate response to each
of the categories you just sorted.
You will sign my name to the
letter and then prepare the
envelope for the response. Any
questions.

CLAIRE

So you want me to become you?

LORAINNE

Well, on paper only!

They both laugh.

LORAINNE

Ok I have to go to Chicago, I will
be back in 3 days. You can handle
this from here?

CLAIRE

I will take over being you!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

They both laugh.

LORAININE

Great. Check in on Bryce for me.
I think he needs to get out more.

CLAIRE

Sure. I will make sure he has
everything he needs.

FADE TO B&W. LORAININE EXITS. ON THE SCREEN WE SEE CLAIRE PRACTICING OVER AND OVER LORAININE'S CLASSIC SIGNATURE. CLAIRE SMILES AS SHE DOES SO.

She stops for a moment and reaches for her purse. She takes out the pearls that she took from LORAININE'S bedroom and puts them on. She takes out the CHANEL No 5 and sprays that on. She takes out a compact and looks at herself and smiles. As she does the signatures she repeats

CLAIRE

I become you. I become you.

The thunder claps loudly and the rain falls hard.

CLAIRE

Look at that road. Treacherous.
Without breaks a car could go
right off the road.

THE SCENE FADES.

Later that afternoon. THIAGO arrives to the Mountain house unnoticed. CLAIRE is busy at the desk signing the name of LORAININE. THIAGO observes this. CLAIRE is unaware that THIAGO is watching. CLAIRE is humming a tune and smiling to herself as she duplicates the signature again and again.

CLAIRE

I become you. I become you.

In an excited voice.

CLAIRE

Look at that road! Treacherous!

THIAGO in a bold direct voice startling CLAIRE and she knocks her tea cup on the floor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

THIAGO

WHAT are you doing.

CLAIRE

Jesus! What are you doing here?
Look what you made me do!

THIAGO

Talking to yourself? Your
resemblance to Miss Loraine is
uncanny. Almost as if you
practiced in a mirror

CLAIRE

Why, Thiago, that's quite the
compliment. I do try to maintain
appearances.

THIAGO

Appearances, yes. Quite the talent
you've got, pretending to be
someone you're not.

CLAIRE

Oh, Thiago, you're always so
observant. It's a wonder you
haven't caught a starring role in
one of those detective flicks.
Now clean up the broken cup. It's
your fault.

THIAGO

No.

CLAIRE

No? You're the help, do it.

THIAGO

I've always preferred the role of
the butler. We see everything,
especially the things people try
to hide. I am not your butler.
What trash you are.

CLAIRE

What did you just say.

THIAGO

Trash. Just a woman in borrowed
pearls, playing a dangerous game.
Games can be fun, until someone
loses. Hand them over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

CLAIRE

Hand what over?

THIAGO goes behind CLAIRE and unclasp the pearls himself.

THIAGO

Stupid woman. Bargain Basement.

CLAIRE

Clean up the mess.

THIAGO grabs CLAIRE from the hair on the back of her head and tosses her down to the floor.

THIAGO

Your mess. You clean it up. In this house, fortunes can change faster than you can say 'impostor.

CLAIRE now picking up the broken cup and determined to maintain her composure.

THIAGO

That will be deducted from your salary. I will be sure to let Mr. Walters know of your clumsiness.

THIAGO Spies the paper with the "Lorraine" signatures.

THIAGO

What is this? What are you up to?

CLAIRE

A task for Lorraine.

THIAGO

I will keep my eye on you.

CLAIRE

Keep your eyes to yourself. Now get out I have work to do.

THIAGO

Miss Lorraine said I should take the letters you have been working on to the post office. Are they ready?

CLAIRE

Of course they are. Take them!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

THIAGO

Please continue with your performance it was lovely to watch "I become you." Not a bad actress.

CLAIRE

Glad to know I'm keeping you amused. I'll be sure to give an encore.

THIAGO

Oh, I have no doubt you will. Just remember, not every audience is as forgiving as I am. I can't wait to see ACT II. Or haven't you learned your lines yet?

CLAIRE

Don't worry, Thiago. When the curtain falls, I'll make sure you have a front-row seat.

THIAGO takes the completed letters and turns to leave. As he gets to the door he stops and turns.

THIAGO

The bottle. Give it to me.

CLAIRE

What bottle?

THIAGO

The CHANEL No 5. In your purse. While you may wear CHANEL you certainly do not have the class, style or grace to pull it off. A shame to waste such a fine scent on Bargain Basement Betty.

He walks back to her and picks up her purse and takes the perfume. CLAIRE doesn't flinch.

THIAGO

Anything else your sticky little paws have lifted? No? Don't worry I am watching you. Now back to your rehearsal. And Action. "I become you. I become you."

CLAIRE

You don't scare me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

THIAGO

Missy, I am not trying to scare.
I haven't even started yet. You
are done for the day. Get your
things. I will lock up.

THE SCENE GOES TO B&W AS CLAIRE GATHERS HER THINGS AND
THIAGO STANDS BY AND WATCHES. SHE HEADS OUT THE DOOR. AS
SHE STEPS OUTSIDE THE THUNDERS ROLLS. SHE GETS IN HER
CAR AND DRIVES AWAY. THIAGO GLANCES AGAIN AT THE
"PRACTICE LORAINÉ" SIGNATURES. HE LOOKS OUT AS HE SEES
HER CAR DIVE OFF.

SCENE ENDS.

ONE MONTH LATER. 7PM. DUSK IS FALLING.

BRYCE AND CLAIRE ARE IN THE STUDY AT THE WALTER'S ESTATE.
THEY ARE KISSING ON THE COUCH.

CLAIRE is 4 months pregnant. CLAIRE interrupts their
kissing.

CLAIRE

I deserve my strand.

BRYCE is trying to get back to kissing.

BRYCE

Strand. Yes you shall get a
strand.

CLAIRE

A double strand. I want more.

BRYCE

Doesn't everyone?

CLAIRE gets up. Changing position and changing moods.

CLAIRE

When?

BRYCE

When what? Come sit back down.

CLAIRE

The pearls. When will I get them?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE

I'll go out tomorrow, right as
rain, you shall have your pearls.

CLAIRE

And?

BRYCE

And? Oh there is more?

BRYCE laughs.

CLAIRE

I am not joking. There is more.

BRYCE

Make a list. I will have Thiago
get it completed.

CLAIRE

No! Not him.

LORAINÉ, ASHFORD, CAROLINE and THIAGO enter in a burst of
conversation, not yet aware that CLAIRE and BRYCE are in
a conversation.

ASHFORD

Lolly you are so clever!

CAROLINE

Yes I couldn't stop laughing. Oh,
Bryce and Miss Bradley is it?

CLAIRE

Bennett, the name is Bennett.

LORAINÉ

Claire, my goodness what are you
doing here at this hour? Bryce
have you been adding on work? You
know our dear Claire assists me
and not you!

BRYCE

I had some things to go over with
Miss Bennett.

CAROLINE

Were you two arguing? I heard
Claire give a sharp "no."

LORAINÉ

Is everything ok? Claire, is
Bryce being too hard on you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

No, no, we were just discussing a strategy for a case that Bryce has coming up and I disagreed with his point of view. I thought it was lacking something.

LORAINÉ

You are helping Bryce with his case? Well, impressive. He never asks me to give my perspective. Engage us! What was the big reveal?

ASHFORD

Sounds like a detective story!

CAROLINE

Lolly tell them your joke! It was marvelous!

LORAINÉ

Well ok in a minute, but first I want to know Claire's point of view. Claire give us the details and then let us guess what your said.

ASHFORD

Oh! Parlor games! I love parlor games!

CAROLINE

Count me in! Ok Miss Bradley.

CLAIRE

Bennett. The name is Bennett.

CAROLINE

Well I am sorry. There is no need for that sharp tone.

CLAIRE

No you are right I am a little on edge today.

ASHFORD

Claire are you, well perhaps I shouldn't ask this.

BRYCE

Correct Ash, you shouldn't ask.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CLAIRE

Go ahead, Mr. Waters, what can I answer for you?

CAROLINE

Ash, I told you not to mention this.

LORAINÉ

Now we have two mysteries at the same time! Bryce's case and Ash's question.

CAROLINE

I do love parlor games.

CLAIRE

Mr. Waters what is your question?

ASHFORD

Well, it seems to me like you are pregnant.

LORAINÉ looks hard and freezes. Like Jackie Kennedy, she maintains composure but you can tell she is visibly shaken.

LORAINÉ

I am going to see Cook and get some dinner together. Claire are you wrapping your day up, I think you can leave now and I will see you at 1 pm tomorrow.

LORAINÉ leaves. The room is quiet for a moment.

CAROLINE

Ash! Look what you've done!

CLAIRE

Yes.

ASHFORD

Well I didn't mean to upset Lolly.

CLAIRE

Yes.

CAROLINE

Oh Bryce, we are so sorry.

CLAIRE

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ASHFORD

Well, I should know better.

CLAIRE

Yes.

CAROLINE

Perhaps I should go check on Lolly.

CLAIRE

Yes.

BRYCE

She will be fine. Maybe we should all call it an evening.

CLAIRE

Yes.

CAROLINE

Claire, you should like a magpie! Yes! Yes! Yes! Can't you see that things are difficult right now?

CLAIRE

Yes.

CAROLINE

Oh for God's sake. Stop with the "yes."

CLAIRE

I was just answering Mr. Waters question. No-one seems to care for my responses. All wrapped up in that self-centered, indulgent little bitch, hack-writer, Lolly. Oh is she ok? Oh did the word "pregnant" get her upset that childless, baron whore.

CAROLINE

My God! You are heartless. Ash, we are leaving. I am going to check on Lolly. Claire I will deal with you later.

CLAIRE responds coolly.

CLAIRE

Yes. Yes. Yes.

CAROLINE groans and leaves. Awkward silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

ASHFORD
Well, this is awkward.

CLAIRE
Yes.

ASHFORD
God damn, woman shut up.

CLAIRE GOES to speak on more "YES" and without warning ASHFORD slaps her mouth.

ASHFORD
I said, shut up!

CLAIRE doesn't react.

ASHFORD
I am sorry. I don't know what came over me.

BRYCE
Claire are you ok?

CLAIRE
Never better.

ASHFORD
Bryce, I will see you at the office tomorrow.

ASHFORD goes to leave. CLAIRE calls him as he reaches the door.

CLAIRE
Mr Waters?

ASHFORD
Yes, Claire? I am tired. What do you want?

CLAIRE
What was the joke?

ASHFORD
What?

CLAIRE
The joke that you were all laughing about?

ASHFORD
Now? You want to hear it now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

CLAIRE

Well life goes on. I could use a good laugh. I did just get slapped in the face.

ASHFORD

My, God, will this night never end?

CLAIRE

The joke. I want to hear the joke.

BRYCE

Let's just call it a night.

CLAIRE now screams.

CLAIRE

The joke! I want to be treated like everyone else in this room. I want to hear the joke!

BRYCE

Ash, please tell us the joke.

ASHFORD

Ok. Ok. "Why don't detectives get lost?"

BRYCE

They have a good sense of direction!

CLAIRE

Ok "Why don't detectives get lost?"

ASHFORD with no emotion.

ASHFORD

Because they always follow the dame's direction.

Silence in the room. They out of the silence CLAIRE laughs a hearty laugh.

CLAIRE

(laugh) They follow the dame's directions (she turns off the humor and now laser focus) Got that Bryce, "Follow the dame's direction.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

Awkward. ASHFORD goes to leave. He is stopped by CLAIRE calling out again.

CLAIRE

Mr. Waters.

ASHFORD

Miss Bennett, I have run out of my patience and my energy for you this evening in such a short time. Does your pregnancy cause this constant nagging? Heaven help the man strapped into your car.

CLAIRE

Mr. Waters, for a lawyer, your words don't cut too deep or have much meaning.

ASHFORD

Sweet Jesus, please get to your point.

CLAIRE

The case. You wanted to know what case I helped Bryce with.

ASHFORD

Frankly, it doesn't make a difference to me. This idea of importance seems relevant to you so have at it. What is the case.

CLAIRE

The one about a woman jilted by her lover. He wants to just pay her off and make her go away.

BRYCE looks at ASHFORD.

CLAIRE

And I said, "No. That won't work." A woman's heart is a locked vault; you never know what treasures or traps lie inside.

ASHFORD

That's it. Brilliant. So glad I stayed for the credits of this movie. Goodnight, Bryce, and please tell Lolly I am sorry.

ASHFORD leaves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

CLAIRE

Are you clear on my point?

BRYCE

Very clear.

CLAIRE

I am starving. I feel like a Bob's Big Boy! And Fries and a chocolate shake!

BRYCE

You are amazing.

CLAIRE

Bryce, I just took a slap in face and didn't budge. Let's not forget my double strand of pearls. Tell Lolly I will see her tomorrow. We have work to do!

CLAIRE strides out. Bryce is shaking his head. He turns to look out the window. Loraine enters. Calm. Cool. Detached.

LORAININE

Bryce, Cook is making chicken almandine for you. I am exhausted.

BRYCE

Ash said to tell you he was sorry.

LORAININE

Nothing to be sorry for. My feelings are my own business, darling. You don't get to claim responsibility for them.

BRYCE

I am sorry.

LORAININE

Bryce, I love you. I cannot give you children. How did she get pregnant?

BRYCE

The usual way I would suppose.

LORAININE

I suppose. Goodnight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

THE SCENE GOES TO B&W. LORAIN LEAVES. BRYCE TURNS BACK TO THE WINDOW.

TWO DAYS LATER. AT THE MOUNTAIN HOUSE.

CLAIRE is busy with SIGNATURES and letters. She is in the study looking out at the view. BRYCE comes in unannounced and comes up from behind and kisses CLAIRE on the neck. CLAIRE doesn't jump. She gives into the kiss.

BRYCE

You know, Claire, there's something about you that I just can't resist.

CLAIRE

Oh, Bryce, you're nothing if not persistent. But maybe you should save your charm for someone who's more receptive.

BRYCE

Why would I do that when I have such a captivating challenge right in front of me?

CLAIRE

A challenge, huh? Is that all I am to you? A puzzle to solve?

BRYCE

You're more than a puzzle, Claire. You're a mystery I want to unravel.

CLAIRE

Careful, Bryce. Mysteries have a way of leading to trouble.

BRYCE

I never minded a little trouble. In fact, I find it exciting.

CLAIRE

And what if I told you I'm more danger than you can handle?

BRYCE

Claire, close your eyes.

BRYCE hands her a small package. She opens the box. It is a double strand of Black Pearls. CLAIRE coos.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

My my. Black Pearls.

BRYCE

Yes I wanted you to be different.

BRYCE

I like living on the edge, Claire.
And with you, it feels like the
perfect thrill.

BRYCE puts the pearls on CLAIRE.

BRYCE

Perfect.

CLAIRE

Shouldn't we worry that your wife
will show up?

BRYCE

No she had a meeting with Ash
today at the office. Going over
some of her contracts with the
publisher. She will be out for
the morning.

CLAIRE

The morning? Well then I should
get to work.

BRYCE

I never liked the ride up here.
The road especially going back
down that road is treacherous. I
hate that road.

CLAIRE

Bryce, you seem tense.

BRYCE

How are you feeling? The baby and
all?

CLAIRE

Oh let's not talk about that.

BRYCE

Do you think it is a boy or a
girl.

CLAIRE

These pearls are lovely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BRYCE

Are you taking the vitamins the doctor prescribed?

CLAIRE

Yes. Now could we not talk about that. I do love these pearls.

BRYCE

Claire. You amaze me. Here you are 6 months pregnant and you seem to have no interest in the fact that you are having a baby.

CLAIRE

Correct. I really want nothing to do with it. I never thought that I wanted children. I still don't.

BRYCE

Then why would you do this?

CLAIRE

Everything. I want everything.

BRYCE

Well I better let you get back to your work. I need to get to the office. I just wanted to surprise you with the pearls.

CLAIRE

And the pearls are lovely. And Bryce I am happy to have your child. Just be sure to have a nanny or someone to do most of the work because, frankly I have no interest in little people.

BRYCE kisses Claire quickly and then turns to leave. CLAIRE tenderly caresses the pearls.

THE SCENE GOES TO B&W. CLAIRE GOES IN FRONT OF A MIRROR.

CLAIRE

I do want everything.

INT: 1 PM. SAME DAY AT THE MOUNTAIN HOUSE.

CLAIRE is having a cup of tea. LORAINNE enters with a large box. This contains the black cocktail, flowing and elegant - Simplicity 2704. Vintage 1950s maternity dress, top and skirt pattern.

LORAINNE

Claire! How are you today? So many things to review with you.

CLAIRE

Lolly, did you want some tea? I have the kettle on.

LORAINNE

I would love a cup.

CLAIRE gets up to get it and LORAINNE stops her.

LORAINNE

Claire! I can get this you relax. Tell me how are you getting on? And I was caught off guard at first when you called me "Lolly" a few weeks ago. That is a name that just a few people use for me. My mom always called me "Lolly." Then when I heard you call me that it was like you bridged the gap between employer and friend.

LORAINNE gives CLAIRE a hug.

CLAIRE

Well thank you, Lolly.

They both laugh and now sit.

LORAINNE

So how are you getting on?

CLAIRE

Fine. The letters are caught up ready to be mailed. I did set your appointment next week for Chicago and

LORAINNE

Yes, yes you are the model of efficiency. But how are you doing?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Well fine.

LORAINÉ

The baby?

CLAIRE

Oh. That. Fine.

LORAINÉ

Are you excited? How is the father? Oh, I am sorry. Can I ask that? That was forward of me.

CLAIRE

The father. Yes has been around.

She loving touches the double strand of black pearls.

CLAIRE

He gave me this today.

LORAINÉ

Oh, Claire! Those are lovely! My my! Stunning on you.

CLAIRE

What's in the box?

LORAINÉ

Oh, Bryce said I must have a new dress for this evening. I am not much for all of that hoopla with fashion. Caroline insisted that I get this dress today.

CLAIRE

Can I see it?

LORAINÉ

Oh, sure. Caroline went with me to pick it out.

LORAINÉ opens the box and takes out the dress. While doing so a car pulls up and CAROLINE gets out. We see her motion to the driver "one minute." CAROLINE burst into the house and then into the study, talking all the way.

CAROLINE

...and I said you don't have the right shoes. You need black pumps. Flats just will not work. No one listens to me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LORAINÉ and CLAIRE smile at each other as CAROLINE continues.

CAROLINE

In this world, a woman's fashion is more than just fabric and stitching. It's armor, a mask, a weapon. Every dress, every pair of heels, every piece of jewelry is chosen with precision, a statement crafted with care. Society sees me as a frivolous socialite, but they don't realize the power I wield in my closet. Fashion is my language, my allure. The right dress can disarm a rival, captivate a room, or ensnare a man in my web. A well-placed brooch, a perfectly fitted gown, these are tools of seduction and manipulation. They see the glamour, the elegance, but beneath that, it's all strategy. A woman's fashion is all she has in her feminine toolkit, a silent but potent force. While men wage wars with fists and guns, we wage ours with silk and satin. A calculated tilt of a hat, the flash of a diamond, the whisper of silk against skin—these are our tactics, our maneuvers on the battlefield of society. In a world that often underestimates us, we must use every means at our disposal. And for a woman, fashion is the ultimate weapon. It's not just about looking good; it's about control, power, and survival. Never underestimate a woman who understands the power of her wardrobe. She's more dangerous than any man with a gun.

LORAINÉ and CLAIRE are amazed at how CAROLINE has gone on. CAROLINE picks up the tea cup of CLAIRE and sips.

CAROLINE

I was a bit thirsty. And let's not forget the shoes. The right shoe completes the look, gives it finality and purpose.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

A pair of killer heels can elevate an outfit from mere clothing to a declaration. They click against marble floors, announcing your presence before you even enter the room. They're the exclamation point at the end of a carefully crafted sentence. In the end, it's not just about what you wear, but how you wear it. And with the right shoes, darling, you're unstoppable.

LORAININE

Caroline, you are unstoppable!

CLAIRE

Bravo, Mrs. Waters.

LORAININE takes her journal and writes down some thoughts.

CAROLINE

Lolly, what are you writing down? Another one of my lines?

LORAININE

Shh. Don't say another word. I loved, "A pair of killer heels can elevate an outfit from mere clothing to a declaration."

CLAIRE

And I loved, "In the end it's not just about what you wear, but how you wear it."

All three laugh.

CAROLINE

Lolly, what is your shoe size? I should know after all of these years.

LORAININE

9. Size 9

CLAIRE

My size, too.

CAROLINE

Well we must go. I have the car waiting. We will be back soon, Claire.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

Shopping is the backbone of a smart woman. It's not just a pastime; it's a calculated pursuit. Each purchase is an investment in the image we project, the influence we wield. In the delicate dance of high society, a smart woman knows that the right wardrobe isn't just about style—it's about strategy. And every savvy shopper knows that, in this game, appearances are everything. Lolly, we are going shoe hunting! And I hate this road to your place. So windy and curved. How do you do it?

LORAINÉ

Caroline you are exhausting!

CAROLINE

Lolly, we must go.

They bustle out and LORAINÉ shouts as she leaves

LORAINÉ

Claire, I will be back in 2 hours!

The scene fades to B&W as CLAIRE watches the two women get in the car, laughing and talking. She watches the car pull away. CLAIRE picks up the new dress and admires herself in the mirror. Talking like she is an aristocrat.

CLAIRE

Oh yes, charmed. Oh this? Well my husband bought me these pearls just today. The dress, well Mitzi you know it is couture! Paris, yes only the finest clothes he buys me.

She turns and laughs and sways. THIAGO has been watching this and waits for the appropriate moment then interrupts with a loud, colorless voice.

THIAGO

Well, well, what have we here?
Playing dress-up again, Claire?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

CLAIRE

Oh, Thiago, I didn't see you there. Just making sure this dress is in order. Lolly, has such impeccable taste, don't you think?

THIAGO

Impeccable. Not the Bargain Basement brand you are used to, right?

CLAIRE

You give me too much credit, Thiago. I'm just trying to keep up appearances. A little fantasy never hurt anyone.

THIAGO

Fantasy, yes. But when it blurs into reality, it becomes a dangerous game. And you're not exactly known for playing it safe. Now put that down. Don't want you to soil the fabric with those greedy little paws of yours.

CLAIRE

You always did have a way with words, Thiago. Perhaps if you'd use them to your advantage, you'd be more than just the butler.

THIAGO

Oh and the pearls? Did you steal those again?

CLAIRE

No. A gift.

THIAGO

A gift? Aren't you a clever girl. Ambition can be admirable, Claire, but only if you know when to rein it in.

CLAIRE

Rein it in? Where's the fun in that?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Besides, you never know what you can achieve until you push the boundaries. Why are you here?

THIAGO

None of your concern. I am leaving now. Mr. Walters needs me to run an errand for him.

CLAIRE

I didn't see a car?

THIAGO

You don't see everything to be clear. I have my motorcycle.

CLAIRE

You on a motorcycle? Really? This I have to see.

THIAGO

You just put that dress away and get back to your work. Why she has you around I have yet to understand.

CLAIRE

Perhaps "understanding" isn't a skill you have mastered yet?

THIAGO

I will be watching you.

THIAGO Leaves. The scene goes to B&W. CLAIRE looks out the window and she hears the motorcycle rev up and then pull away as THIAGO departs. CLAIRE dances around the room one more time with the dress. She exclaims:

CLAIRE

Oh Mitzi, isn't the life of the rich and famous wonderful!

THE SCENE FADES.

INT: MOUNTAIN HOME, IN THE STUDY

An hour later CLAIRE is working and hears the voices outside of LORAINÉ and CAROLINE. LORAINÉ enters and we hear her talking to CAROLINE as she enters the house. CAROLINE stays in the car and drives off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LORAINÉ

Yes I will see you at the hotel at 7 for the event. Thanks for the shoes!

LORAINÉ enters the room where CLAIRE is sitting.

LORAINÉ

OK I am back. How has your day been?

CLAIRE

Good. Mr. Waters called and asked you to stop by his office, before you go home to sign some papers.

THUNDERS cracks outside and the rain comes down hard.

LORAINÉ

This is not a good time. I need to get home and get ready.

CLAIRE

Well, why don't you go the meeting with Mr. Waters and I will bring your dress and shoes and then help you get ready for tonight. I can do your hair and make-up.

LORAINÉ

I couldn't ask that of you.

CLAIRE

My pleasure. I would love to.

LORAINÉ

Well if you are sure. That be lovely. Like a "girls night!"

CLAIRE

Can I see them?

LORAINÉ

See what?

CLAIRE

The shoes. Can I see the shoes?

LORAINÉ

Well, of course.

LORAINÉ takes the shoes out of the box. It is like CLAIRE is seeing the RUBY SLIPPERS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

Oh, now those are a "killer pair of heels!"

LORAINÉ

I think that they may be too much. Let me see them on you.

CLAIRE

Me? Really.

CLAIRE is transformed (almost) to royalty. She walks To and FRO and radiates in the new heels.

LORAINÉ

Oh they do look marvelous. Caroline insisted I get them. Black Tie event.

CLAIRE

Well they will look wonderful. They feel delicious.

LORAINÉ

Caroline said I should wear my hair up in a French twist.

The thunder cracks and the lights go off for a moment then come back on. The rain starts. Neither woman is daunted by the lightening.

CLAIRE

Oh I can do that for you. I am very good at the perfect French Braid. Will you be ok on the drive down?

LORAINÉ

Me? I know this road in my sleep. I will just need a good set of wipers, the brakes and my intuition! Ok I must get going if I want to be back at the house in time for our "Girls Night."

LORAINÉ gives CLAIRE a hug.

CLAIRE

Ok, Lolly, I will see you at the house.

LORAINÉ SMILES and exits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

THE SCENE GOES TO B&W.

CLAIRE opens the window to view the car pulling away and leave the drive. She can see the car drive off go behind some trees and then veer and breaking the guardrail. A crash is heard and an explosion. CLAIRE puts on the heels and smiles.

CLAIRE
Traucherous roads. Who could
survive that crash?

CLAIRE SMILES.

THE SCENE FADES.

INT: 6PM. AT THE MOUNTAIN HOUSE.

CLAIRE is wearing the new dress and heels that LORAINÉ purchased. CLAIRE is just finishing putting her hair in a French Twist. She puts on the black pearls. The Phone Rings. She lets the phone ring 3 times then picks it up calmly.

CLAIRE
Hello the Walters' home, this is
Claire, how can I help you?

BRYCE IS ON THE LINE SOUNDING PANICKED.

BRYCE
Claire! Have you seen Lolly? She
should have been here a while ago.
Where is she? It is getting late
and I cannot miss this dinner.

CLAIRE
She didn't call you?

BRYCE
No. About what?

CLAIRE
She had to leave to drive upstate
for a meeting about her new novel.
She had gone shopping with Mrs.
Waters earlier, then came back and
then left.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE

What? No she didn't mention this?
Where was she going to?

CLAIRE takes out a compact and looks at herself, applies RED lipstick as she is talking.

CLAIRE

Bryce , Lolly said she was meeting her agent. She said it was important. I am surprised she didn't call you.

BRYCE

Damnit. I have this dinner that I must attend. I hate going alone.

CLAIRE

What can I do to help?

BRYCE

Nothing. Ah well, no I couldn't ask that of you.

CLAIRE

Bryce anything. What do you need?

BRYCE

Well, oh this is messy. I dislike messy. Would you go with me to the dinner? But it is a black tie event. You would have to be dressed.

CLAIRE

I can be ready in 30 minutes.
I'll meet you at the hotel.

BRYCE

Really? Just provide your name at the reception. I will call ahead and give them your name.

CLAIRE

Perfect. Now don't worry
everything will be fine.

CLAIRE hangs up. She smiles. Checks her look in the mirror. Turns off the lights and heads to the car.

INT:8PM AT THE GRAND HOTEL FOR THE CITY FUND RAISER FOR THE ARTS.

Black tie event. Crowded room with all guests dressed to "the 9's" Cocktails being served. Jazz band playing. Food is passed. We hear bits of conversation. BRYCE is in the middle of the crowd with his eye on the main entrance. He is talking with CAROLINE and ASHFORD. No word from CLAIRE.

BRYCE

I don't know. Claire said that Lolly, told her she had a meeting.

CAROLINE

Well, that is odd as Lolly said nothing to me.

ASHFORD

Lolly loves events like these. Bryce, you just crumble. How did you become a high-powered attorney and my partner!

ASHFORD continues to speak along with CAROLINE in the background. BRYCE looks at the main door as CLAIRE enters. Radiant. Wearing the new dress that CAROLINE and LORAINE bought along with the shoes and the black pearls from BRYCE. Heads turn. BRYCE is in a state of shock and adoration and does not hear CAROLINE and ASHFORD talking. CAROLINE'S voice comes back into the conversation.

CAROLINE

Bryce what do think?

BRYCE

Hmm? What?

CAROLINE

What do you think?

BRYCE

I'm sorry I was not paying attention.

CAROLINE

What has caught your eye?

CAROLINE turns around and sees CLAIRE coming towards them in the dress she helped pick out for LORAINE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE

What in the name of heaven is
this?

CLAIRE joins the three of them. She gives BIG, over-the-top hugs to all three of them and plants a RED lipstick kiss on Caroline's cheek.

CLAIRE

Oh, my dear friends! Caroline!
Ash! Bryce. So lovely to see you.

CLAIRE puts her arm locked in with BRYCE. CAROLINE looks down at the shoes.

CLAIRE

Oh I know, just a "Killer set of
heels" right Caroline? They fit
like a glove.

ASHFORD

I think I am missing something.

CAROLINE pushes on the chest of ASHFORD as to silence him.

CAROLINE

Claire, darling, I see you've made
quite the impression tonight. You
blend in so well, one might almost
believe you belong here.

ASHFORD

Now Caroline

CAROLINE ignores ASHFORD.

CAROLINE

Attitude and a dress, indeed. But
fitting in isn't quite the same as
belonging, is it? There's a
certain... finesse that can't be
bought. The shoes fit, so it
seems but what game are you
playing here.

BRYCE

Lolly had to go to a meeting with
her agent and I asked Claire to
join us.

CLAIRE locks her arm in with BRYCE. CLAIRE smiles like a tiger ready to eat her next meal of CAROLINE

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

Finesse, you say? I've always thought it was more about confidence. And I must say, confidence has never been a problem for me. And with Lolly out of the way, I thought why let this dress sit on the sidelines?

CAROLINE

Out of the way? What does that mean, Miss Bennett?

CLAIRE reaches out to gently touch the check of CAROLINE.

CLAIRE

Oh Caroline! We are friends. No need for last names! Do call me Claire. And I didn't mean "Out of the way," i meant "Out of the picture" as Lolly is away this evening. With little notice from Bryce, I did not have time to go home and figure out what to wear to such an event!

CLAIRE TURNS and as she does she spins BRYCE around with her. She laughs as she turns and says with a smile to only BRYCE.

CLAIRE

You better shut the mouth of that cow. I will not have her digging at me.

CLAIRE turns again and laughing as she does so.

CLAIRE

Caroline! Ashford! IT is so good to see you. Bryce and I never get the time to chat with you.

CAROLINE

"Bryce and I?" Have you lost your mind? Why are you wearing the dress that I bought for Lolly? Why? What kind of game are you playing, Miss Bennett.

CLAIRE

Caroline, please we are friends.

CAROLINE

We are not friends.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CLAIRE

Your loss. "The game" as you so care to call it? The only game I play is the kind where I come out on top. Care to play, Caroline?

BRYCE

Ladies, ladies, put your claws away! Now, now all will be fine.

CLAIRE

See, Caroline? All will be fine.

CAROLINE

There are many shades of "fine" Miss Bennett. Oh I do love how that dress hides your condition.

CLAIRE laughs and digs her nails into BRYCE'S arm.

CLAIRE

Oh Caroline, bless your little heart. Look at your concern for my appearance given my "condition." You people are so sweet!. Bryce they are sweet, don't you think? She is so authentic.

CAROLINE

Authentic? In this city, authenticity is as rare as a saint in a speakeasy. Everyone's got a mask, a role to play, a story to spin. They talk about being real like it's some kind of virtue, but the truth is, it's just another con. You want authentic? Look in the mirror at three in the morning when the whiskey's worn off and the lies you tell yourself are staring back at you. That's as close as you'll get. The rest? Just smoke and mirrors, darling. Smoke and mirrors that is all you have to offer. And you trying to pull off some charade that you are a replacement of Loraine! Ha! A cheap substitute.

CLAIRE further digs her nails into BRYCE'S arm. He smiles and winces.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CLAIRE

I'll be sure to keep that in mind.
Let's all enjoy the evening.

Two police officers enter and they ask where is BRYCE WALTERS. People nod and look and point. A waiter comes by with champagne on a tray and CLAIRE takes a glass. The police now find BRYCE and come up to him.

OFFICER

Mr. Walters? Mr. Bryce Walters?

CLAIRE

What is it, Bryce?

CAROLINE

Ash, what is going on?

BRYCE

Officer how can I help?

OFFICER

I need you to come with me.

CLAIRE

Oh the party has just gotten started!

CAROLINE

Woman, hush.

CLAIRE

I will not be/

BRYCE

Ok you two, settle down. Now, officer what is going on?

OFFICER

Mr. Walters I need you to come with me.

BRYCE

What has happened.

OFFICER

I do not want to speak here.

BRYCE

Out with it man. What is happening?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

OFFICER 2
Look, Mac, there's been a
situation.

ASHFORD
A situation?

CAROLINE
Lolly! Is she ok?

CLAIRE sips on the champagne and watches.

OFFICER 2
Look, we got to take you to
identify.

OFFICER
I will handle this. Mr. Walters,
I am sorry, he is new on the job.
Can we get you to come with us?

BRYCE
Is Lolly ok? Ash, will you come
with me?

ASHFORD
Bryce, certainly.

CAROLINE
What happened to Lolly? Would
someone tell me?

CLAIRE finishes her glass of champagne. She looks around
uninterested.

OFFICER 2
The dame's dead.

OFFICER
I said let me handle this.

BRYCE
Dead!

ASHFORD
Oh my God!

CAROLINE
No!

Caroline faints.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

CLAIRE

My God, such drama. It's like
we're in a movie?

BRYCE

My Lolly is dead.

OFFICER 2

Dead as a doornail/

OFFICER

That is quite enough from you.

OFFICER 2

Sorry, boss.

OFFICER

Now, Mr. Walters please come with
me.

The crowd now gets wind of the news and it starts
spreading through the room. The police take BRYCE and
ASHFORD. Mayhem ensues. CLAIRE calm.

CLAIRE

Caroline, can I give you a ride
home?

CAROLINE

Thanks, but I'll pass. I've had my
share of rides to nowhere, and I
can tell yours is a one-way
ticket. Keep the engine running
for someone else. My path's still
got a few twists I haven't taken
yet.

CAROLINE rush off. CLAIRE sees a waiter with the tray of
champagne. She takes a glass and then spies a very
handsome, James Bond looking man. CLAIRE walks up to the
man and looks him over. She speaks cool and seductive.

CLAIRE

Well, isn't this just my lucky
night? Left without a partner and
finding a handsome devil like you.
Care to help a gal fill her empty
dance card? I promise, you'll find
I'm quite the dancer, sugar?

The man smiles. The shot goes to B&W. CLAIRE is given a
long hug and a kiss and they head to the dance floor.
The scene fades. Newspaper headlines swirl:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

- Famed Novelist Plunges to Death in Ravine Crash
- Mystery Writer's Life Ends in Tragic Mountain Wreck
- Ravine Claims Wealthy Author in Fatal Car Accident
- Best-Selling Writer Dies in Fiery Mountain Plunge

INT: THE COUNTY MORGUE

At the morgue BRYCE, ASHFORD, OFFICER and OFFICER 2. The pathologist pulls out the slab and pulls back the cover. The camera does not show the body, only the people in the scene see the body. BRYCE reacts.

BRYCE

Oh my lovely, what happened to you?

OFFICER 2

Burnt up.

BRYCE

Oh my God

OFFICER 2

The brakes were shot, and she never had a chance. Looks like she went off the road at high speed. There was no one else involved. I'm sorry, but she didn't make it.

ASHFORD

Bryce, let's get you out of here.

OFFICER 2

I mean she really/

OFFICER

That will be enough. I am sorry Mr. Walters. I know there are no words that can ease your pain right now, but please accept my deepest condolences. If there's anything I can do to help you through this, don't hesitate to ask.

THE SCENE FADES AND SWIRLS TO B&W.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MONTAGE SCENES (ABOUT 30 SECONDS) OF THE FUNERAL SHOWING BRYCE, CAROLINE, ASHFORD, THIAGO AND OTHERS. WE SEE THE PROCESSION, THE GRAVESITE AND THEN BACK TO THE ESTATE.

INT: WALTERS ESTATE

BRYCE takes off his jacket and tie. THIAGO enters. The mood is somber.

AS THIAGO WALKS IN THE SHOT GOES FROM B&W TO COLOR WHEN BRYCE ANSWERS.

THIAGO
Sir? Sir? Mr. Walters.

BRYCE
Yes? Yes? Sorry my head is
pounding.

THIAGO
Do you want/

BRYCE
Yes a double.

THIAGO
I think I may join you.

THIAGO pours 2 drinks and gives a glass to Bryce.
THIAGO'S eye well up with tears and a tear rolls down his
cheek. THIAGO is a hard, no-emotion man. He raises his
glass

THIAGO
To Mrs. Walters!

BRYCE
To Lolly!

THIAGO & BRYCE
To Lolly!

They sit in silence for a moment.

THIAGO
Sir, there is someone here for
you.

BRYCE
Jesus, Thiago, not today.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THIAGO

That is what I said, but she won't take no for an answer.

BRYCE

Can't the dead be given time to be at peace?

The door to study bursts open and CLAIRE enters like she is taking centerstage at a play ready to perform for her fans. Her emotions are over-the-top.

CLAIRE

Bryce, Momma has arrived.

The dead are dead, and that's all there is to it. You can waste away, mournin' and weepin', or you can choose to live. Life's for the livin', after all. No sense in lettin' the past chain you down.

CLAIRE takes the drink out of THIAGO'S hand.

CLAIRE

I know you might think it's too soon, but the world doesn't stop turnin' for our grief. It moves on, and so must we. We owe it to ourselves, and to Lolly to embrace the days we have left. So here's to the future, to seize every moment. The dead are dead, and it's time for the rest of us to start livin' again!

CLAIRE raises a drink and cheers and no one joins her.

CLAIRE

To Lolly!

THIAGO

Woman have you no decency?

CLAIRE

Oh Thiago, relax. Things are going to change. We are going to move on. We ALL are going to move on, right Bryce?

BRYCE

It just seems so soon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

Fasten your seatbelts, darlings, because things are going to change around here. The old ways, the quiet whispers, the shadows that lurked in every corner—they're all gone. We're stepping into the light now, and it's going to be a dazzling, unpredictable ride. I'm not here to follow in anyone's footsteps; I'm here to blaze a trail. So, brace yourselves. The rules are different, and if you're not ready for the ride, you might just get left behind. This is my time, and I'm going to make every moment count. Here's to the new era—hold on tight, it's going to be one hell of a journey!

BRYCE

Well, I am not sure/

CLAIRE

I am sure! Thiago I have my bags in the car. Go get them and take them to my room.

THIAGO

You are staying out in the stables with the other animals?

CLAIRE

Oh, Thiago, you and I will be good friends. You'll see. Bryce, back me up here.

BRYCE

Thiago.

THIAGO

Sir?

BRYCE

Let's get her bags and take them to Lolly's room.

THIAGO pauses and gives a cold sinister look.

THIAGO

Miss Bennett, you may have everyone else fooled, but not me. I've seen too many masks in this house to fall for another one.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

THIAGO (CONT'D)

You may walk these halls like you own them, but they whisper to me. They tell me things. Secrets. Lies. And I've learned to listen. I don't trust you, and I never will. The real Mrs. Walters, God rest her soul, had a light in her eyes, a grace you can't imitate. But you... there's a darkness behind that smile, a shadow that gives you away. Mark my words, Miss Bennett, this house has a way of revealing the truth. And when it does, you'll wish you'd never stepped foot in it. Until then, I'll be watching. Every step, every whisper. Because some of us still remember what loyalty and honor mean.

CLAIRE does a slow clap.

CLAIRE

Oh, isn't this rich? The loyal butler playing detective. How quaint. You think your cold stares and cryptic warnings intimidate me? I've faced far worse than the ghost stories of an old house and the disapproval of a manservant. A MANSERVANT! You don't trust me? How tragic. But trust is such a fragile thing, easily shattered and rarely earned. Unlike you, I'm not here to play by the old rules or win your favor. I'm here because I belong here now.

So, keep your watchful eye on me, if it makes you feel important. But remember this: the past is dead, and your loyalty died with it. Because, darling, this house and everything in it now bend to my will. And that includes you.

THIAGO

As you wish Miss Bennett.

THIAGO turns to leave.

THIAGO

Oh, Miss Bennett.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CLAIRE

Thiago, we are friends. You can call me Claire.

THIAGO

Miss Bennett. We are not friends. Anything you would like for dinner this evening. Mr. Bryce will be out for the evening.

CLAIRE

Waldorf Salad and Chicken a la king. And Bryce will be in with me for the evening.

THIAGO

Very good, Miss Bennett.

THIAGO leaves. Pause for a moment. CLAIRE walks around the room. She then goes to BRYCE and gives him a big, long hug. Now talking like a mother to a child.

CLAIRE

Momma knows its been hard. Poor Bryce bearing up and putting on a face that everything is "OK."
Well my dear

CLAIRE breaks away and the mood goes to a drill sergeant:

CLAIRE

New rules. I am here and like I said I do want everything. First of all you better have a talk with that manservant of yours. I will not have him trying to undermine me. I won't have it is that clear?

CLAIRE looks at Bryce who looks like a lost puppy. CLAIRE snaps her fingers.

CLAIRE

Bryce!

BRYCE

Yes you are here. But don't you think it might be a bit too soon?

CLAIRE

Honey. The woman is dead. Move on. Sad really, but none the less, She is out of the picture. I told you I would handle it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

THIAGO enters with OFFICER and OFFICER 2

THIAGO

Sir?

CLAIRE

Thiago no visitors now.

OFFICER

Mr. Walters, I am sorry to interrupt.

CLAIRE

Mr. Walters has had a rough day can't this wait?

OFFICER 2

Seems we may have a murder on our hands.

OFFICER

Hush now let me handle this.

BRYCE

A murder you say? What does that mean?

CLAIRE

A murder? Foolishness. Now out with you.

OFFICER

We just need to clarify a few things.

BRYCE

Ok but let's be brief, I have had an exhausting day.

OFFICER

We got ourselves a real mess here. Mrs. Walters, God rest her soul, wasn't just another casualty of bad luck. Her brakes? Cut clean through. That ain't no accident, that's cold-blooded intent.

He paces, his footsteps echoing softly in the tense silence. OFFICER 2 paces following his lead.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

OFFICER 2

Somebody wanted her out of the picture, and they didn't care how it went down. But what they didn't count on was me.

OFFICER

Well, us. See, I'm gonna piece this puzzle together, one grim detail at a time.

He locks eyes with each suspect, holding their gaze as he continues.

OFFICER 2

She was supposed to be home by 6. Now, why the change in plans? Miss Bennett you saw her last.

CLAIRE

She said she had a meeting with her agent.

OFFICER

We called her agent and he did not know anything about this.

CLAIRE

Why would Lolly, lie?

OFFICER

Why would she lie?

OFFICER 2

Seems like a mystery to me. Boss what'd think?

BRYCE

I think we should have this conversation another time. The brakes were cut?

OFFICER 2

Snip. Snip.

BRYCE

Oh my God.

OFFICER 2

Snip. Snip. Then (with great excitement) BOOM! CRASH! FIRE!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

OFFICER

That will be enough.

OFFICER 2

Yes sir. I waz tryin' to paint the picture.

CLAIRE

My God, it is like watching bad comedy.

OFFICER speaking directly to BRYCE

OFFICER

Your wife's gone and the insurance pays out handsomely. But tell me, where were you when her brakes failed? Or were you busy somewhere else, plotting your alibi?

The OFFICER takes out a cigarette, lights it, and takes a long drag, the smoke swirling around his face.

OFFICER 2 sees this and does the same trying to imitate OFFICER his mentor. They both look long at BRYCE.

BRYCE

I was here. Thiago was with me.

OFFICER 2 Turns on a dime to FACE CLAIRE who doesn't flinch.

OFFICER 2

This ain't no simple hit-and-run. This is murder, pure and simple. So, let's cut the crap and start talking. Because one way or another, justice will be served. So Miss Bennett, spill the beans. Snip. Snip.

CLAIRE brushes by OFFICER 2 and laughs.

CLAIRE

You boys think you've got me all figured out, don't you? You think a few questions and a smoky room make you detectives? Please. You ain't got nothing on me. Or Bryce. Now I would focus on Thiago. The help always want to get a free ride. He was in her WILL I bet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

OFFICER

I am not at liberty to say.

CLAIRE takes the cigarette from OFFICER 2 and sits in a chair. She breathes in deep and the smoke slowly comes out.

She leans back casually, crossing her legs, exuding an air of nonchalance that belies the gravity of the situation.

CLAIRE

Sure, I was there that day. I am probably the last one to see her alive. Thiago was there as well. He just shows up like some ghost. Talking in his platitudes about "what he knows" Please. He is the one you should be focusing on. I've been around. But being in the wrong place at the wrong time ain't a crime, last I checked.

She leans forward slightly, her voice dropping to a low, dangerous whisper.

CLAIRE

You want to pin something on me, you better bring more than suspicions and smoke-filled threats. I'm not just some dame you can scare into a confession.

She smirks again, a hint of amusement flickering in her eyes.

CLAIRE

Thiago, show these gumshoes out. And boys you may want to linger a bit, outside, and get Thiago's thin line of truth about his whereabouts on that tragic day. My poor Bryce, you've had to endure so much.

CLAIRE hugs BRYCE perhaps a little too long. She kisses him full on the lips. She turns and ushers the OFFICERS and THIAGO to door of the study.

CLAIRE

So go ahead, boys. Keep playing your little detective games.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

But remember, until you've got something real, something concrete, you're just wasting our time. Right Bryce?

BRYCE looks like a lost puppy

BRYCE

Yes, dear.

CLAIRE

Oh and boys, do put your detective skills to the test and give Thiago your best interrogation.

The OFFICERS and THIAGO leave. CLAIRE pauses. She walks over to BRYCE and kisses him. He hold back for a moment and then they make passionate love. CLAIRE IS 7 months pregnant. BRYCE moves her to the window and takes CLAIRE from behind. BRYCE drops his pants and rips his shirt off as he ravages CLAIRE in anal sex. CLAIRE moans with delight.

SCENE from the outside as THIAGO is standing in the driveway and the OFFICERS pull away. THIAGO looks to the house and sees CLAIRE in the window with BRYCE thrusting behind her. CLAIRE gives slight waive and smiles. THIAGO'S grows fierce and cold.

CUT BACK to inside the study, CLAIRE and BRYCE having anal sex. You can hear their moaning.

BRYCE

God I needed this. Sweet mother of God I needed/

CLAIRE

Momma is here.

The scene goes to B&W as they finish. Outside thunder claps and rain comes down. CLAIRE open the window.

OUTSIDE the house in the driveway, THIAGO standing in the rain, watching the sex scene. The window now open he can here CLAIRE moan and BRYCE yelling "Sweet Mother of God..." THIAGO growls. The scene fades.

INT: MOUNTAIN HONES ONE MONTH LATER.

CLAIRE and BRYCE are at the mountain house. 2pm. Clear sunny day. They are sitting in the living room with the windows open. A cool breeze blowing through.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Bryce darling, have you ever thought about our future? What it will look like once this thing is over and I am back to my normal shape?

BRYCE

Claire, my love, with you by my side, I can't imagine anything but happiness. What's on your mind?

CLAIRE

Well, Bryce, it's just... You have everything—money, power, this beautiful home. Two beautiful homes. A yacht here, a yacht there. The president and your social gatherings And soon, a child. But what about me? What about my security?

BRYCE

Claire, you know I'll take care of you and our child. Whatever you need, it's yours.

CLAIRE

Darling, I need to be sure. What happens to me if something were to happen to you?

A car pulls up. OFFICER and OFFICER 2 get out. A knocker heard.

BRYCE

Let me go get that.

CLAIRE

Keep those apes away. I have no time for them.

Bryce goes to open the door. We hear his conversation off in the distance and then get louder as he comes into the room.

BRYCE

Officers what can I do?

OFFICER

Sorry to bother you, I was hoping to ask a few more questions.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OFFICER (CONT'D)

I assume that Miss Bennett is here
as well?

BRYCE

Well she is but why would you
assume

From the room CLAIRE yells

CLAIRE

Bryce, love, let the men in so
that they can do their little
questioning session and then
leave.

BRYCE and the OFFICERS enter.

OFFICER 2

Ma' me.

CLAIRE

Yes, charmed to see you again.
Are you old enough to carry a gun?

BRYCE

Please ignore that, she is working
on a stand up routine.

OFFICER

Miss Bennett, so good to see you
again.

CLAIRE

Yes, I do wish I could say the
same but I don't make it a habit
of lying.

OFFICER 2 takes out his detective pad and writes
something down.

CLAIRE

What are you writing down?

OFFICER 2

Notes. I like to keep notes. You
never know when you just might tie
all the facts together.

CLAIRE

Officer, can you keep your boy on
a leash and a muzzle. And what
are you writing down anyway that
is so interesting to you? Hmmm?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OFFICER 2

You said "I don't make it a habit of lying." I thought that was interesting. So you used to lie? You still lie but not as much? Or you lie when it is convenient or easy. Habits take 21 days.

CLAIRE

21 days?

OFFICER

Yes. 21 days to make an action your own.

BRYCE

Officers what can I do for you.

The OFFICER takes out a cigarette. Bryce stops him.

BRYCE

Miss Bennett is pregnant.

CLAIRE

Yes we must think of the child.

OFFICER 2

Who is the father?

CLAIRE

None of your business.

OFFICER 2

Oh is this that habit thing. Lie. Don't lie. I get confused.

CLAIRE

And I am getting bored.

BRYCE

Now officers what Can I do for you?

OFFICER

I am still confused about some details on the final day of Mrs. Walters. How did you come to know, Miss Bennett, that Mrs. Walters had an appointment with her agent?

CLAIRE

Because she told me so. Plain and simple.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

OFFICER 2 takes out his pad again and writes down as he speaks each word

OFFICER 2

Plain and simple.

CLAIRE

Brilliant we have a magpie in the room.

BRYCE

Claire.

CLAIRE

Forgive me. We have a schoolboy practicing his grammar lessons!

OFFICER

Miss Bennett on that day, what exactly did Mrs. Walters say to you about her change in plans?

CLAIRE

We have been over and over this. Doesn't little police boy take notes.

OFFICER 2 looks over with a curt look.

OFFICER

I would like you to tell me one more time, please Miss Bennett, for me.

CLAIRE

Well, only because it is for you. Junior over there is getting on my nerves.

OFFICER

Miss Bennett, if you please.

CLAIRE

Well you know, Lolly, Mrs. Walters. No fuss. No frills. No fanfare. She came back after she had rushed out shopping with Mrs. Waters for shoes. Mrs. Waters said, "And let's not forget the shoes. The right shoe completes the look, gives it finality and purpose. A pair of killer heels can elevate an outfit from mere clothing to a declaration.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

They click against marble floors,
announcing your presence before
you even enter the room. They're
the exclamation point at the end
of a carefully crafted sentence.

OFFICER 2 taking more notes.

CLAIRE

What is Junior writing down now?
Or is he practicing his cursive
style!

OFFICER 2

Shoes. I like the line about the
shoes.

CLAIRE

Oh we like woman's shoes is that
it, Junior? Hmmm.

OFFICER 2

No, no, I liked they way the were
described. "They're the
exclamation point at the end of a
carefully crafted sentence.

OFFICER

Miss Bennett! Can we stay on
point here

CLAIRE

Well you've no cause to be short
with me, raising your voice, and
me in my condition.

OFFICER 2

Who is the father?

CLAIRE

Bryce I think they need to leave.
I am not feeling well.

OFFICER

Just One question.

OFFICER 2

Wait, Mr. Walters you are the
father? I figured it out!

BRYCE

What are you talking about.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

OFFICER 2

That would guy the guy the motive.
Knock off his wife. New wife
takes over.

OFFICER

Now everyone settle down.

CLAIRE

You all need to go.

OFFICER

Miss Bennett. One question?

CLAIRE

What is it?

OFFICER

Where do you live these days.

CLAIRE

Oh Bryce, call the doctor!

The scene goes to B&W as there is a madcap rush to get
CLAIRE seated. Then to the car. Then at the hospital.
Bryce outside the delivery room pacing. THIAGO, CAROLINE
and ASHFORD join. The OFFICER and OFFICER 2 are there.
All of them talking but now voices heard. Then CLAIRE'S
voice is heard screaming.

INT: COUNTY HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM

CLAIRE

Oh My God! Sweet Jesus. Stop the
Pain. Bryce you dirty, filthy
rich bastard, I want everything!

A slap is heard and the sound of a baby. A nurse bursts
out to BRYCE and the people waiting and exclaims:

NURSE

You have a baby! Everyone is fine.
Miss Bennett is now resting. It
was a hard birth.

THIAGO

Good.

CAROLINE

Who got slapped? The harder the
better.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASHFORD

Too bad it didn't go on for a few more hours.

NURSE

Slapped? Well the Doctor did the slap to the Baby.

CAROLINE

I wish her labor had gone on for days.

THIAGO

Weeks.

BRYCE

Ok, Ok. Enough.

OFFICER

So, I take it Mr. Walters that you are the father?

OFFICER 2

I knew it! I knew it!

OFFICER

What tipped you off.

OFFICER 2

Hen pecked.

OFFICER

What?

OFFICER 2

I seen it in my brother, Billy when he got married to Veronica. You know "Billy" used to mean strength, determination, a force to be reckoned with. But now? Now Billy's nothing but a meek little lamb, and it's all thanks to her-Veronica.

You'd think she was a magician the way she changed him. Once upon a time, Billy stood tall, shoulders back, eyes full of fire. Now, he slinks around like a whipped pup, following her every command. She's got him wrapped around her finger, a puppet dancing to her every whim.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OFFICER 2 (CONT'D)

It's almost pathetic, watching him jump at her slightest word, eyes downcast, voice barely a whisper. The guy who used to stand up to anyone and anything now can't even muster a shadow of his former self around her. Veronica.

She's got a way, that's for sure. A way of bending men to her will, of stripping them of their pride and making them thank her for it. I don't know what spell she's cast on him, but it's strong—stronger than anything I've ever seen. And the worst part? He doesn't even see it. He thinks it's love, thinks he's doing right by her. But I know better. I see the fear in his eyes, the doubt. He's lost himself in her shadow, and I'm not sure there's any coming back. Billy, my strong, indomitable brother, reduced to a shell of a man. All because of Veronica.

BRYCE

Well, that has happened to me.

CAROLINE

Now it makes sense. When Lolly was here you were fun.

ASHFORD

Now you are a puppet dancing.

BRYCE

I am not a puppet.

OFFICER 2

I've seen it before I am seeing it now in Billy, I mean Bryce, I mean Mr. Walters.

OFFICER

This sheds some new light on the situation, you being the father. Are you marrying Miss Bennett.

BRYCE

No!

OFFICER 2

Lost himself in her shadow, I say.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BRYCE

No!

OFFICER 2

Reduced to a shell of a man.

BRYCE

Dammit would you shut up.

OFFICER 2 takes out his pad and writes as he speaks out.

OFFICER 2

Veronica equals Claire. Billy equals Bryce.

BRYCE

Nurse! What is it?

NURSE

What is what?

BRYCE

The baby! Is it a boy or a girl?

NURSE

A boy.

BRYCE

A Boy! Ash I have a boy!
Caroline I have a boy! I must go
see my son!

BRYCE, ASHFORD, CAROLINE and the NURSE rush off to go see the son. Pause as OFFICER looks at OFFICER 2.

OFFICER

I never knew you had a brother
Billy?

OFFICER 2

I don't.

OFFICER

Then what was that all about.

OFFICER 2

Detective work. Make them sweat a
little, crack, till they spill the
beans. I do have 3 older sisters:
Franca, Beatrice and Veronica. You
think I can stand up to them?

Pause. They look at each other and smirk and nod.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

OFFICER & OFFICER 2
Whipped Pup.

OFFICER
Little lamb.

OFFICER 2
Slink around.

They pause look at each other and then laugh as they say together:

OFFICER & OFFICER 2
VERONICA!

OFFICER
Come on let's get out of here. We got work to do. You hungry?

OFFICER 2
Yea, I want a Blue Plate Special.

OFFICER
What is that?

OFFICER 2
Daily specials that typically included a main dish, a couple of sides, and a dessert, all for a reasonable price.

OFFICER
Then let's make it 2!

The two walk out. OFFICER claps OFFICER 2 on the back and they laugh as they exit repeating lines from the VERONICA story.

INT: INSIDE THE DELIVERY ROOM.

BRYCE, CAROLING, ASHFORD, and CLAIRE is awake in the bed. CLAIRE is enjoyably detached already. BRYCE is holding the baby.

CAROLINE
What's his name?

ASHFORD
Yes, what is the young lad's name.

BRYCE
What do you think, Claire?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She thinks for a moment. Then mater-of-fact.

CLAIRE

Cash. Cash Walters.

CAROLINE

Cash? Why that name. Why not Bryce, JR or

CLAIRE

The name is going to be Cash.

ASHFORD

And why the name "Cash?"

CLAIRE

A baby is not cheap and I want to make sure we all remember that.

The baby starts to cry. BRYCE goes to hand the baby back to CLAIRE.

CLAIRE

Oh God no. I did my job. I don't like little ones. They smell. They cry. They take, take, take. Selfish little bastard. Let Auntie Caroline hold him. Or let him cry. Now I need you all to leave. I need a nap. Birthing is exhausting.

CAROLINE

Bryce, let me take little Cash. I love babies.

CAROLINE coos and kisses and talks baby talk to Cash.

CLAIRE

Leave I must take my nap. Bryce, have them bring some real food. I will not have the slop they serve here. I will be ready to be picked up tomorrow at 1. Tell cook I want Lobster Thermidor for dinner tomorrow night. And did you get my Chanel No. 5?

BRYCE

No.

CLAIRE

No to what Bryce? My Thermidor or my Chanel?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BRYCE

The Chanel.

CLAIRE

Oh, ok love. Well on your way home please stop and pick that up.

BRYCE

Sure thing.

CLAIRE

Cash I like that name. Very expensive.

BRYCE, CAROLINE, and ASHFORD leave with CASH.

THE SCENE GOES TO B&W AS CLAIRE PICKS UP A LIFE MAGAZINE WITH DEBBIE REYNOLDS.

INT: SIX MONTHS LATER AT THE ESTATE.

Sunny, windows open. IMPORTANT NOTE - Through most of this scene EVE, the nanny will only be seen from the chest up (She is pregnant) This will come out shortly.

CLAIRE is talking to COOK and THIAGO is there. CLAIRE is arranging flowers while she speaks.

CLAIRE

Listen closely, darling, because I won't repeat myself. This menu—this sad, uninspired collection of dishes you've proposed—it's simply not going to cut it. My guests, the crème de la crème of society, expect nothing short of perfection. And perfection, my dear, is not what you've presented here. Do you really think a simple roast and a few boiled vegetables will impress them? These people dine at the finest restaurants, they travel the world, they have palates that demand the extraordinary. They know Ike. A dinner party under my roof is not some pedestrian affair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE has entered along with OFFICER and OFFICER 2. They observe. CLAIRE does not know they are there and witnessing this scene.

CLAIRE

It's an event, a spectacle, a statement of taste and sophistication. Lobster Thermidor, now that's a dish. Rich, decadent, a true showstopper. And the dessert? A mere chocolate cake? Absolutely not. We need something with flair, with drama. A flambé, perhaps, or a soufflé that rises to the occasion. Baked Alaska! Make Baked Alaska, considered a symbol of culinary elegance and sophistication. I suggest you go back to the drawing board, quickly. Because if you think for one second that I will allow my reputation to be tarnished by a mediocre meal, you are sorely mistaken.

THIAGO

Tarnished? That could hardly happen.

CLAIRE

Thiago. I thought we took out the garbage yesterday, yet here you still are.

THIAGO

Crab Imperial.

CLAIRE

What? Crab Imperial. I never heard of it.

THIAGO

Shame really. That is a signature dish. Such style.

CLAIRE

Cook then make Crab Imperial!

COOK

I can't. Well not the way she made it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

Who? Who are you talking about?

THIAGO

The Lady of the house. Mrs. Walters.

CLAIRE

I am the Lady of the house.

THIAGO

No as you are certainly not a lady.

BRYCE, OFFICER and OFFICER 2 enter.

OFFICER

OK put the cuffs on her.

OFFICER 2 goes to put the cuffs on and CLAIRE slaps him.

BRYCE

Claire calm down.

THIAGO

Bargain basement trash.

CLAIRE

You shut up, manservant.

The baby starts to cry that EVE is holding. CLAIRE spins around in a rage.

CLAIRE

Shut that thing up. God I detest little people.

OFFICER

Claire Bennett I am arresting you for the murder of Loraine Walters.

OFFICER 2 cuffs CLAIRE. She swings at him and he ducks.

CLAIRE

Me? You all think you're clever, don't you? Sitting there with your self-righteous faces, thinking you've got it all figured out. Now Cook, Make that Crab thing and I do want Baked Alaska.

OFFICER

Ma'am, you have the right to remain silent

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CLAIRE

And we need some appetizer with significance.

THIAGO

Perhaps, "pigs in a blanket?"

CLAIRE

Thiago you are just a manservant.
SHUT UP!

OFFICER

Anything you say can and will be used against you in court.

CLAIRE

Oh my God, Officer! You are still talking. I didn't invent this game; I just played it better than the rest.

OFFICER

You have the right to an attorney

CLAIRE

An attorney? Are you serious I am surrounded by attorneys! Bryce don't just stand there. Be an attorney! Jesus get some backbone.

The baby cries. CLAIRE SPINS around.

CLAIRE

Eve, shut that thing up!

OFFICER

If you can't afford one, we'll provide you with one. Do you understand?

CLAIRE spins back around to face the OFFICER.

CLAIRE

Do I understand? He wanted a baby. I didn't do this. Prove it. Oh you will be crying soon enough, Bryce will have your jobs. Right Bryce? Bryce say something.

OFFICER

So you understand?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CLAIRE

I didn't do anything. Cook, make that brioche you make. That will be lovely. And Thiago no one enters the ballroom until 7:05pm exactly!

OFFICER flips back through his notepad and reads verbatim out loud and matter-of-factly:

OFFICER 2

"I do wish I could say the same but I don't make it a habit of lying." You miss Bennett are a liar. Lying is your habit.

CLAIRE

You filthy, little, puny, YOUNG little cop.

OFFICER

Show Miss Bennett the pictures.

OFFICER 2 pulls out pictures of CLAIRE cutting the brake lines. CLAIRE is in the party dress the LORAINÉ bought. The camera shows the pictures.

CLAIRE

Where did you get those? That's an imposter. Tell them Bryce, that's not me.

OFFICER 2

So if this is not you, why are you wearing the Party Dress on the night of the murder while cutting the brakes?

CLAIRE

That's not me. Imposters!

OFFICER 2

Looks like lying IS your habit.

CLAIRE kicks OFFICER 2.

OFFICER 2

Yep. Veronica, 100%

CLAIRE

How did you get these alleged pictures? Bryce for the love of God do something.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

THIAGO

I took them. I said I would keep
an eye on you.

CLAIRE

I saw you leave.

THIAGO

But you didn't see me come back. I
knew you were trash.

CLAIRE

Lies! Bryce!

The baby cries.

CLAIRE

Eve, for the last time you shut
that baby up.

OFFICER

Thiago, bring her in.

THIAGO LEAVES.

CLAIRE

Oh are we playing party games?
Can't wait for this one. Are we
playing "You Bet Your life?"
Queue the theme music. Bryce you
better God Damned do something. I
had your child. Remember his
name? Cash. That means that you
got to pay!

THIAGO enters with LORAINÉ, CAROLINE and ASHFORD.
Silence in the room. You can see CLAIRE'S head spinning.
The servants gasp and cry.

COOK

Mrs. Walters is it you? Is it
really you?

COOK runs to her. Hugs her and weeps.

COOK

I thought we lost you. I thought
you were dead.

CLAIRE

What is this? You are dead. I
cut those brakes. I saw that car
go off the road. I heard

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

OFFICER

Anything you say can and will be used against you in court. You do understand, Miss Bennett.

CLAIRE

And now, here I am, the villain in your little story. You may have caught me, but you'll never unravel the whole truth. So go ahead, lock me away. Write your headlines, spin your tales. But remember this: the world doesn't run on justice; it runs on power. And I had it in spades, darlings. Maybe someday you'll understand that.

OFFICER

Officer, take her away!

THE SCENE GOES TO B&W WITH HUGS AND MERRIMENT.

LORAINNE goes to EVE and picks up the baby. Little Cash smiles.

THE CAMERA NOW SHOWS EVE 5 MONTHS PREGNANT.

LORAINNE gives Eve a hug. CAROLINE and ASHFORD leave.

BACK to COLOR.

COOK

Mrs. Walters what would you like for dinner.

LORAINNE sounding tired.

LORAINNE

Sandwiches. How about we all have sandwiches!

LORAINNE and BRYCE hug and he gives LORAINNE a gentle kiss on the lips. LORAINNE turns to EVE, gently touching her face.

LORAINNE

Eve how are you feeling? You look wonderful. Bryce won't it be nice to have a 2nd Child in our family?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

LORAINNE (CONT'D)

Eve, let's take Cash upstairs for his nap, he has had a BIG afternoon! Then you need to rest. Bryce where should you, Eve and I and the two little ones go on holiday this year. Oh I so love "little ones!"

BRYCE

How about we all stay right here.

LORAINNE

Right here? Eve, what do you think?

EVE

Mrs. Walters

LORAINNE

Oh Eve you are family now, we are all going to be together! Call me Lolly.

EVE

Oh, Lolly, I would love that! And staying here sounds wonderful!

THE SCENE ENDS

INT: 1 YEAR LATER. ON A HOLLYWOOD MOVIE LOT.

THE CAMERA PANS IN FROM THE BACK. TECHNICAL PEOPLE, MOVIE PEOPLE ARE ALL AROUND. THERE IS A FEELING OF EXCITEMENT IN THE AIR.

AS THE CAMERA MOVES ALONG, PEOPLE ARE PASSING IN FRONT. IT SHOULD FEEL LIKE THE VIEW IS RIGHT THERE ON THE SET.

The set is the conference room of "Walters & Waters"

Various "Chairs" are there and the camera shows the back of the chairs and people in them all talking.

-THE WRITER - Loraine Walter

-THE DIRECTOR - Billy Wilder

-"CLAIRE" - Liz Taylor

-"LORAINNE" - Lana Turner

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

- "BRYCE" - Frank Sinatra

- "CAROLINE" - Shelly Winters

- "ASHFORD" - Jimmy Stewart

- "THIAGO" - Ricardo Montalban

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

Liz are you ready?

CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR)

Of course. This is a great scene.

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

Frank you set?

BRYCE (FRANK SINATRA)

Yea, boss, all set.

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

Now make it feel like you are surprised and intrigued by catching her in the act.

BRYCE (FRANK SINATRA)

You got it.

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

Ok, let's shoot this scene.

CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR) gets into place. The picture on wall is LORAINÉ (Lana Turner) toasting.

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

Liz you look beautiful.

Liz winks. On the side, off Camera, the "real" BRYCE, THIAGO, CAROLINE and ASHFORD are together. Hushed and very excited. CAROLINE whispers.

CAROLINE

This is so exciting!

SECOND ASSISTANT CAMERA MAN

OK "The Substitute Wife" scene 2.

He snaps the CLAPPER.

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

Ok, QUIET ON THE SET.
AND....ACTION!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The actress "Claire" act as the scene description is on the voice over.

VOICE OVER BY TECH PERSON

CLAIRE brings some file folders to the office of BRYCE. She notices a large portrait of LORAIN WALTERS toasting a glass of champagne. The photo is elegant. Loraine is the height of style and grace (think Jackie Kennedy). CLAIRE looks long at the photo and then "practices" imitating LORAIN. Talking in a high style voice and acting out like she is at a top-drawer dinner party.

CLAIRE

Oh yes, thank you. Oh Paris, simply lovely this time of year. Oh yes, the yacht? Of course, Mitzi the yacht is Newport and of course we have one in the Hamptons...oh you don't have one there oh shame, really. Bob you flirt, well of course these diamonds are real. Bryce only buys me the best...oh yes Bryce is a love...Mitzi you should have a man like Bryce, except my Bryce is taken by me!

VOICE OVER BY TECH PERSON

CLAIRE does a toast in the air and smiles.

The actors act as the scene description is on the voice over.

VOICE OVER BY TECH PERSON

Outside BRYCE'S office we see (but do not hear) CLAIRE toasting and talking and laughing. BRYCE walks up a sees this and smiles. He opens the door and catches CLAIRE off-guard. She is quickly embarrassed.

CLAIRE

Oh, Mr. Walters, i was just

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BRYCE

Claire no bother. I loved watching you do whatever it was that you were doing.

CLAIRE

Nothing, sir.

BRYCE

Well you certainly had a lot of drama going on for nothing? Now tell me what where you doing?

CLAIRE

Well, nothing, really. I used to be an actress in my high school back in New Haven and

BRYCE

Oh I love New Haven. Such good working class people there.

CLAIRE

And I saw, and I love, that rather large picture here on the wall of Mrs. Walters. She looks so lovely toasting to some crowd.

BRYCE

Oh yes, that was from the Gala with Ike.

CLAIRE

Ike?

BRYCE

Ike. The president, Dwight D Eisenhower .

CLAIRE

Oh, my that must have been marvelous. Who was there?

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

CUT! That was perfect.

BRYCE (FRANK SINATRA)

Liz, just great. Just great.

OFFICER and OFFICER 2 are in the wings and they talk in hushed voices.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

OFFICER

*Liz Taylor. I am this close to
THE Liz Taylor*

OFFICER 2

*And me this close to Rat Pack
Frank!*

CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR)

Oh thanks. Such an interesting
character. I can't wait to do
that scene where she goes on about
the food at the dinner party. Who
talks like that?

They both pause and look at each other and then say
together and laugh:

CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR) & BRYCE
(FRANK SINATRA)

Veronica!

Pan to OFFICER and OFFICER 2. They speak in a hushed
tone.

OFFICER 2

They said "Veronica!"

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

Liz and Frank that was excellent.
We are moving on to the kiss at
the end of that scene. I want to
make sure, Liz that we do not show
your breasts, lovely as they are.

CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR)

Got it Billy, I am ready.

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

Frank I want you to surprise Liz
with that kiss. Surprise yourself
as well.

BRYCE (FRANK SINATRA)

Got it Chief. I am set.

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

OK crew let's get this scene done.
We are ahead of schedule and I
want to stay that way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

THE SCENE FADES TO B&W AS WE SEE A MONTAGE OF THE BEHIND THE SCENES PRODUCTION. PAN TO THE "REAL" LORAINÉ" IN HER CHAIR MAKING NOTES ON THE SCRIPT. PAN TO THE "REAL" BRYCE WITH CASH, AMY WITH A LITTLE GIRL IN HER ARMS. PAN TO THE "REAL" THIAGO, CAROLINE AND ASHFORD SMILING AND LAUGHING. PAN TO OFFICER AND OFFICER 2 TALKING.

INT: THE COUNTRY FEMALE PENITENTIARY

Ladies jail. Lots of chatter. The "Real" Claire is lounging on a bed in the jail cell. Her cell mate Beula is with her. Beula is a mousy, quiet woman. A guard comes by with a large envelope for Claire. It has already been opened. The guard hands it to Claire.

FEMALE GUARD

Bennett you got some mail here.

CLAIRE

Hey it's already been opened.

FEMALE GUARD

You want privacy around here?
Good luck.

BEULA

What is it Claire?

CLAIRE open the envelope. It is a magazine. On the cover is Liz Taylor. The Headline: New Wilder film with Liz, Frank, Jimmy "The Substitute Wife"

CLAIRE

Well, well.

BEULA

Oh "The Substitute Wife" with Liz Taylor, Frank Sinatra and Jimmy.
Oh my God I love Liz Taylor!

CLAIRE

Cool your jets Beula. Relax.

A note falls out of the magazine. As CLAIRE reads the note we hear the voice of THIAGO

CLAIRE (AND THE VOICE OF THIAGO)

Don't think for a second that these bars mean you're free of me, Claire. You will be in there for life. I'll always be watching. Every visitor, every letter, every whisper that echoes I'll know.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE (AND THE VOICE OF THIAGO)

You see, justice isn't just about the sentence; it's about making sure the guilty never forget their crimes. So, enjoy your cell, sweetheart. Because out here, I'm making sure you never escape my sight. Ever. Thiago.

CLAIRE

Enjoy your victory while it lasts, darling. But remember, even behind these bars, a game is still being played. And in the end, everyone pays their dues. Until then, sweet dreams.

CLAIRE

Beula what are you in here for?

BEULA

Like most of us, murder?

CLAIRE

Beula you can't make up your mind. Who did you murder?

BEULA

Jimmy, my husband. That two-timing, cheating louse of a schlep. But

CLAIRE

But?

BEULA

I didn't do it. But if I had done it, he deserved it.

The scene ends. Headlines read "Movie of the Year The Substitute Wife"

THE END

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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