

The Substitute Wife

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THE SUBSTITUTE WIFE

INT BOARD ROOM OF WALTERS & WATERS, ATTORNEYS

Hollywood, 1953.

Queue the title and theme music for "The Substitute Wife."

The air is thick with cigar smoke and the tang of expensive brandy. Eight men lounge like kings in a smoky, mid-century boardroom, their laughter loud, their voices dripping with arrogance.

At the head of the table, BRYCE WALTERS, a charismatic and powerful attorney in his late 30s, embodying the quintessential image of success with his tailored suits, polished charm, and magnetic presence. On the surface, he is the epitome of a devoted husband to Lorraine, but beneath the veneer lies a man driven by ambition and the insatiable pursuit of control. Bryce is a master manipulator, skilled at navigating both the courtroom and the delicate social dynamics of his world, yet his fatal flaw is his inability to resist temptation.

BRYCE

Claire, bring us some ice.

Off camera.

CLAIRE

Yes, Mr. Walters.

INT: OUTSIDE THE BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS

CLAIRE BENNETT, 25, easy on the eyes. Has style but not all the wardrobe accessories she would like. Claire wants more out of life.

POV: The first view of Claire is a heart locket around her neckline.

CLAIRE BENNETT, 25, easy on the eyes. Has style but not all the wardrobe accessories she would like. Claire wants more out of life.

Claire's fingers gently caress the locket.

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She takes out her compact, applies of lush layer of the reddest lipstick, checks her hair, takes an eyeliner and touches up just a bit.

Every glance, every smirk from the men inside will be a challenge to her composure. Claire knows what awaits her on the other side: their leers, offhanded remarks, and sense of entitlement. She hates it, but she also knows how to play her role.

Claire adjusts the small, borrowed pearl earrings she wears to give herself an air of sophistication. She glances down at her simple dress, smoothing the fabric, willing it to exude the confidence she doesn't always feel.

Emotionally, Claire is a storm of contradictions.

Claire breathes in, lifting her chin. With the tray of ice balanced perfectly in her hands, she steps into the room.

INT: THE BOARDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Claire enters, and the men fall silent, their attention snapping to her like moths to a flame.

The men exchange glances, their smirks deepening. The men talk but view Claire. She is very aware of this and plays up to the attention.

ATTORNEY 1

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

ATTORNEY 2

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

ATTORNEY 3

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

Claire sets the ice down, feeling Bryce's eyes on her.

CLAIRE

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

The men hoot and holler. For a brief moment, she feels a flicker of power, a reminder of why she endures this.

CLAIRE

My goodness, what am I to do?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALL
Say "yes!"

BRYCE
Claire is mine.

The men laugh. Bryce watches Claire, a flicker of admiration in his eyes.

The room hushes, a moment of tension. She turns back to the men and the poise of Marilyn Monroe.

CLAIRE
In a manner of speaking.

BRYCE
You pack of wolves settle down. Claire, stay an extra hour. We'll review a few tasks after this meeting.

CLAIRE
Very good, Mr. Walters.

She turns and exits, her back straight, her steps deliberate.

INT: OFFICE OF BRYCE

Claire steps into Bryce's office, file folders in hand.

The room exudes power and wealth—a place where decisions are made and fates are sealed.

Her eyes land on a large portrait of Lorraine Walters, poised and elegant, toasting with a champagne glass. Claire lingers, gaze locked on the portrait. Her breath slows. A flicker of something—recognition? A memory stirs.

FLASH CUTS - MEMORY OR FANTASY?

-FLASH: Champagne bubbles rise in a crystal flute— Lorraine's delicate fingers wrap around the stem.

-FLASH: A burst of laughter. Lorraine turns—but is she looking at Claire? Or is Claire just watching from the sidelines?

-FLASH: A hand touches Lorraine's pearls—but whose hand? Claire's? Or someone else's?

-FLASH: The camera flashes— a photographer's bulb pops, freezing Lorraine mid-smile.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-FLASH: A reflection in the champagne glass—Claire's face, just behind Lorraine's shoulder.

BACK TO PRESENT - CLAIRE IN THE OFFICE

Claire blinks, the portrait snapping back into focus. The champagne glass in Lorraine's hand is motionless, frozen in time.

A shiver runs down Claire's spine. Her hand lifts involuntarily, adjusting her posture to mirror Lorraine's.

CLAIRE

"To a life well-lived..."

A whisper of a smile. For a fleeting second, Claire isn't Claire anymore. She's Lorraine—or at least the version of herself she wishes to be.

CLAIRE

Oh yes, Paris was divine this time of year. The yacht? A necessity, of course. Mitzi, darling, how could you not have one in the Hamptons? Oh, Bryce is such a love, always spoiling me...

Claire moves with theatrical confidence, holding an imaginary glass, her hand gliding through the air as if greeting invisible admirers. For a moment, she is completely free, no longer the underdog in a world stacked against her.

CLAIRE

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.

INT: OUTSIDE BRYCE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Claire twirls in the office, lost in her performance. Her laughter is rich and uninhibited, a rare display of joy. She toasts to an unseen audience, completely unaware of her surroundings.

In the shadows, Bryce Walters watches her, intrigued. He's seen Claire's polished professionalism, her quiet ambition, but this version of her—vivid, unguarded—is entirely new.

Bryce opens the office door, the sound pulling Claire out of her fantasy. She freezes, her back stiffening as if she's been caught in an act of rebellion.

INT: BRYCE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Her cheeks flush, the color betraying her embarrassment. For a moment, she feels small and exposed, like a child caught playing dress-up. Her hands fumble as she sets the folders on his desk, avoiding his gaze.

CLAIRE

Oh, Mr. Walters! I was just/

BRYCE

No need to explain, Claire. I'm sorry for interrupting what was clearly a very important toast.

His tone is light, almost teasing, but Claire hears the curiosity beneath it. She glances at him, her expression caught between mortification and defiance.

She doesn't want Bryce to see how deeply his presence has unsettled her.

CLAIRE

Just... a silly memory. I used to act in high school.

BRYCE

High school acting? You looked more like a queen in her court.

Bryce's words land unexpectedly. He's not mocking her, he's watching her, studying her with an interest that feels disarming.

CLAIRE

Sometimes pretending is all we've got, isn't it?

She lifts her chin, testing the waters of her confidence again.

Emotionally, Claire shifts: the embarrassment lingers, but a flicker of power begins to grow. If she can own the moment, turn it to her advantage, maybe she can rewrite how Bryce sees her—not as a secretary caught in a childish fantasy, but as someone bold enough to dream.

BRYCE

Pretending? You made it look real.

She steps closer to the portrait of Lorraine, gesturing to the pearls in the image.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Real or not, it's nice to imagine
sometimes, isn't it? The parties, the
champagne, the diamonds. Even if they
don't belong to you... yet.

Her emphasis on "yet" hangs in the air, a quiet challenge.
Bryce raises an eyebrow, intrigued.

BRYCE

Ambition suits you, Claire.

CLAIRE

So does knowing what you want.

She meets his gaze head-on, no longer shrinking from his
attention. The moment hangs, electric. Bryce chuckles softly,
shaking his head as he picks up the folders.

INT: CLAIRE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Claire enters her apartment, and the contrast between her
modest reality and the grandeur of the world she longs for is
stark. Her space is small, plain, and almost lifeless, a
reflection of her current circumstances.

She moves through her nightly ritual with quiet resignation.
The cheese sandwich on white bread is utilitarian, a far cry
from the champagne and fine dining she envisions for herself.

Sitting on her bed, she picks up an outdated entertainment
magazine, its tattered pages a metaphor for her own faded
hopes. As she flips through the glossy photos of glamorous
women and dazzling parties, a flicker of longing and envy
surfaces.

She turns off the light, leaving only the moonlight streaming
through her window. The soft glow transforms her room for a
moment, making it feel almost magical. As she closes her
eyes, her mind pulls her away from the confines of her
reality.

INT. DOWNTOWN DEPARTMENT STORE - DREAM
SEQUENCE

The world shifts. We enter Claire's dream, where reality
melts into a lush, cinematic fantasy.

Claire, now dressed like Lorraine, is the epitome of elegance
and confidence. Her gown flows as she glides through the high-
end department store, the embodiment of a woman who has
everything she's ever wanted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Emotionally, Claire is transformed: in this dream, she isn't pretending—she is the woman she longs to be.

She sprays Chanel No. 5 on her wrist, and for a moment, the scent is more than perfume—it's power, allure, and the promise of belonging.

Claire drapes herself in diamonds and pearls, their glint catching the warm glow of the showroom lights. The staff fawns over her, their voices honeyed with reverence. *

BOUTIQUE MANAGER

(gracious, almost
worshipful)

Mrs. Walters, you wear them
exquisitely.

Claire—no, Lorraine—smiles, modestly accepting the praise as if she was born into this world of luxury. She tilts her wrist, admiring the diamond bracelet. No price tags. No hesitation.

A champagne flute appears beside her—someone offers it, unseen. She takes it, sipping with effortless grace. The reflection in the glass distorts, shifting between Claire and Lorraine.

A soft laugh. A voice, barely audible.

LORRAINE & BRYCE

(V.O.) (WHISPERING IN HER EAR)

You belong here.

FLASH CUTS - MEMORY OR ILLUSION?

-FLASH: A sleek limousine idles at the curb, the chrome reflecting the city's glow.

-FLASH: Claire steps outside, the cold night air thick with promise. A doorman tips his hat.

-FLASH: A gloved hand extends from the open car door—not Bryce's hand. Or is it? Could it be Lorraine's? The glove is elegant, but genderless.

-FLASH: Claire looks back the staff waiving in admiration.

-FLASH: The voice again, silkier this time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LORRAINE & BRYCE
(V.O.) (teasing,
intimate)

See how easy it is?

-FLASH: Claire takes the mysterious hand and steps into the car.

SMASH CUT TO: INT. CLAIRE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The dream shatters, and Claire wakes abruptly.

She's back in her modest apartment, the cracked mirror staring back at her like a cruel reminder of reality.

She sits up slowly, her reflection distorted in the cracked glass.

CLAIRE (TO HERSELF)
One day, it'll all be mine.

INT. BRYCE'S OFFICE - NEXT AFTERNOON

The rain lashes against the windows, casting shadows that dance across the room like restless spirits.

Inside, Bryce and Claire are bathed in the warm glow of a single desk lamp, the intimate setting thick with tension. Claire's presence in the room feels intentional, almost predatory—but not overtly.

Bryce leans in closer than necessary, his charm and confidence radiating. He's the one who *thinks* he's in control, but Claire is already steps ahead.

Her emotions are a cocktail of control, ambition, and calculated detachment. She knows this kiss is a key to unlocking Bryce's deeper desires and vulnerabilities.

BRYCE
Claire, have you ever wanted more?

CLAIRE
Everyone wants more. But more has a cost. I want More than anything.

Claire stands near the grand portrait of Lorraine, frozen in time—poised, powerful, untouchable. The flickering candlelight makes Lorraine's painted eyes seem watchful. Lightening flashes and illuminates the room. Thunder cracks.

BRYCE
Claire, I can give you more.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

His hands find her waist. A moment of hesitation. Then—he kisses her.

Claire lets it happen, but her eyes remain open, her mind already calculating the next move. She exhales, tilting her head just enough to let him kiss her neck. But—

FLASH CUTS - REAL OR IMAGINED?

-FLASH: Bryce kissing Claire in the dim office—his grip possessive, needing her.

-FLASH: Bryce kissing Lorraine in a golden-lit ballroom—her smile poised, practiced.

-FLASH: Claire and Lorraine—closer than before, breath mingling before lips meet in secret.

-FLASH: Lorraine's lips at Claire's ear—whispering something we can't hear.

-FLASH: Bryce's hands tightening around Claire's waist, as if staking a claim.

-FLASH: Claire's hands, hesitant, grazing Lorraine's pearls—like she's slipping into her skin.

BACK TO PRESENT - BRYCE'S OFFICE

Claire's breath catches. She blinks, the flashes retreating like waves pulling back from shore. Bryce's lips are still on her neck, oblivious.

Claire lifts her gaze back to Lorraine's portrait. Lorraine's champagne glass is frozen mid-toast as if she knows something Claire doesn't. A slow, knowing smile creeps onto Claire's lips. She tilts her head, letting Bryce continue.

BRYCE

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

CLAIRE

I know.

BRYCE

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

CLAIRE

Strange isn't it? A woman like her. A man like you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE

What do you mean by that?

CLAIRE

Oh, nothing. Just things people say. I just noticed there aren't any family photos around. It's a lovely house, but no kids, must make it a little quieter than it could be, don't you think?

Bryce turns and is quiet. His mood has changed.

BRYCE

Yes, children.

Claire now seduces Bryce with kisses on his neck. She talks as she kisses.

CLAIRE

I mean you both are young and active and I didn't mean to pry. It must be difficult wanting something so much and knowing you can't have it.

BRYCE

And we can't.

CLAIRE

Can't?

BRYCE

Can't. We've tried everything. Doctors, treatments, prayers. None of it has worked. 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. 4 miscarriages in 4 years.

CLAIRE

It's funny, Mr. Walters, how someone can seem so untouchable. Like a perfect portrait on the wall. But up close, you realize they're just flesh and bone. Like anyone else.

She moves closer to Bryce, the tension building between them. She tilts the scales.

Bryce looks like he's about to respond, but Claire unexpectedly leans in and whispers

CLAIRE

You can't help it, can you? Somethings you just can't resist.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BRYCE

What do you mean?

CLAIRE

Wanting something you know you
shouldn't ..Touch.

Bryce turns and kisses Claire. Like passion out of anguish.
A long deep passionate kiss.

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.) We never see
the exposed breasts of Claire. We do see the bare ass of
Bryce who is in fine shape. This scene fades.

INT: A LITTLE LATER IN THE OFFICE

Claire is wearing Bryce's shirt, the ultimate symbol of her
conquest. Her movements are languid, as though she belongs in
this space. But her mind is anything but at ease.

BRYCE

You are dangerous you know that?

CLAIRE

Yes.

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!

Bryce growls. Claire changing the tempo.

CLAIRE

So what happens next?

BRYCE

Let's just stay in this moment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Bryce picks up Claire and they collapse on the couch. The phone rings. Bryce ignores it.

CLAIRE

Should I get that?

BRYCE

No. It is probably, Lolly. Checking up on me.

CLAIRE

Are you a man who needs to be checked up on?

INT: THE STUDY AT THE WALTERS ESTATE

The audience, like Bryce, is left captivated, wondering just how far Claire will go and how much she's willing to risk to get what she wants.

Lorraine Walters is a strong, independent, and composed woman who has learned to weather life's storms without breaking. A woman of grace and intellect, a presence as striking as the storm outside. Her perfectly tailored outfit suggests control, but her sharp eyes betray a mind that never stops spinning. Beneath her strength lies a deep pain over her failed dreams of motherhood and a subtle fear of being replaced or made irrelevant.

Though absent, Claire looms over the scene.

The rain beats heavily against the large windows, thunder rumbling in the distance. The room is elegant but feels cold, weighed down by an air of unspoken tension.

THIAGO, A sharp, well-groomed man with an impeccable sense of style that teeters between refinement and intimidation. He has a lean, wiry build, and his piercing eyes seem to see straight through to your secrets. He moves with calculated precision, his every action deliberate. He sees everything. He will do anything for Lorraine and Bryce. He stands by, watching her as if trying to anticipate her next move.

THIAGO

Miss Lorraine, shall I close the windows? The storm is intensifying.

LORRAINE

Leave them open. This house needs air. Stagnation is worse than any storm. I'll be heading to the mountain house soon. Make me a sandwich—actually, make it two, please. I may not be back for dinner.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE WATERS, Caroline Waters, mid-40s, is a socialite with an unshakable sense of decorum and a sharp tongue that could cut glass. She's the quintessential 1950s upper-crust woman, draped in pearls and perfectly coiffed hair, embodying elegance and wit. Married to Ashford Waters, a prominent Hollywood agent, Caroline uses her charm and savvy to navigate the elite social circles of 1953 Hollywood with ease.

CAROLINE

Lolly, in this weather?

LORRAINE

It's just rain, Caroline. I've got work to do. Besides, it's never the storm that gets you—it's the complacency. I called Bryce, but he did not answer.

Thiago hesitates, then nods.

THIAGO

I'll check on Mr. Walters for you, Miss Lorraine.

LORRAINE

You always take such good care of me. It's not like him not to answer. He must be busy, I guess.

Thiago exits, leaving Lorraine and Caroline alone. The sound of the rain fills the room.

CAROLINE

What's this work that's dragging you out into a storm?

LORRAINE

I've started writing again. Took a long enough break.

CAROLINE

Writing. Or is it... the other stuff still weighing on you?

Lorraine pauses, her composure tightening.

LORRAINE

What are you getting at, Caroline?

CAROLINE

The children. Or, not having them.

Lorraine remains calm, almost detached.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LORRAINE

We've tried everything. Doctors, treatments, prayers. Four miscarriages in four years. I wanted a child, but it wasn't in the cards.

Her voice wavers for the briefest moment, then steadies.

LORRAINE

Hope is for people who don't know when to quit.

Thunder cracks loudly, and the lights flicker. Caroline jumps, giving a little scream. Lorraine doesn't flinch.

CAROLINE

I'll never understand how you stay so calm. It's...unnerving.

LORRAINE

I love the thunder. Always have. It's loud, powerful, impossible to ignore, just like me.

CAROLINE

So independent. How does Bryce deal with that?

LORRAINE

I've always been taught to take care of myself.

CAROLINE

And Bryce? How is he?

Lorraine narrows her eyes slightly, sensing an edge in Caroline's tone.

LORRAINE

Bryce is fine. Why wouldn't he be?

CAROLINE

Oh, you know how men are. Always need something—or someone—on the side.

LORRAINE

What exactly are you trying to say, Caroline?

Caroline leans in, her voice low but teasing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CAROLINE

I just mean...they always seem to have a "substitute wife" tucked away somewhere. At least the ones I know.

Lorraine freezes, the phrase hitting her like a sudden gust of wind.

LORRAINE

What did you just say?

CAROLINE

Substitute wife.

Lorraine stands abruptly, crossing to the table where her journal sits. She flips it open and grabs a pen, her mind racing.

LORRAINE

That's it. "The Substitute Wife."

She writes it down with conviction, the phrase igniting something deep within her.

LORRAINE

Perfect. The "Substitute Wife."

She looks at Caroline, her excitement almost childlike for a moment. She hugs Caroline.

LORRAINE

Caroline, you're a genius.

CAROLINE

Oh, it's nothing special.

LORRAINE

It's everything. You just gave me a whole book of ideas.

Caroline watches her, a mix of admiration and unease.

CAROLINE

But what if I'm right?

LORRAINE

You're not. Bryce would never have a substitute.

She shuts her journal with finality, her tone sharp now. She turns back to the open window, staring out into the storm.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CAROLINE

Lolly, just think about what we talked about. Bryce and the substitute.

LORRAINE

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

Lorraine 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!

INT: FRONT ENTRANCE TO WALTERS ESTATE/STUDY

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

Bryce and Claire burst through the grand doors, soaked from the rain. Their laughter echoes in the elegant but imposing space. Thiago stands by, unamused, his sharp eyes assessing the scene as the storm rages outside.

THIAGO

Mr. Bryce...soaked to the bone, as usual. You know you're prone to colds. Shall I prepare a remedy?

Bryce gives a "thumbs up" to Thiago

BRYCE

Thiago, always looking out for me. We'll need two glasses of brandy. And find Claire something dry to wear.

Thiago glances at Claire, his expression sharp, his silence heavy with judgment.

THIAGO

Sir how long is the lady staying?

BRYCE

Until I say otherwise. When's Lolly back?

THIAGO

Mrs. Walters didn't give a time. She took her dinner to go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE

Perfect. She won't be back for hours.
 Claire, Thiago will get you settled.
 I'll be back shortly.

Bryce exits. Thiago gives Claire the "once-over" and is not amused. His disdain is palpable.

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.

THIAGO

Bennett, yes. Unremarkable

CLAIRE

And you? What exactly do you do here?

THIAGO

I keep things together.

CLAIRE

I bet you do.

THIAGO

How exactly does a...young woman like yourself find her way into Mr. Walters' Corvette? Hitchhiker? Lost? Or did you flash those legs of yours?

CLAIRE

Hitchhiker? Let's get one thing clear, Thiago. I'm Bryce's personal assistant. I attend to his needs.

THIAGO

Mr. Walters' needs are my concern, Miss Bennett. In this house, I see to everything.

CLAIRE

And yet, here you are...clearly falling short. Now, show me where to change.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I'd hate to be stuck in these wet clothes too long, wouldn't want to catch a cold.

THIAGO

This way, madam.

He gestures toward the hallway, his movements clipped and precise. Claire follows, but not before glancing at her reflection in a nearby mirror. She adjusts her damp hair, giving herself a quick, approving once-over.

INT: LORRAINE'S BEDROOM

They go upstairs to the Bedroom of Lorraine Walters. There is a photo on the make-up table.

FLASH CUTS - REAL OR IMAGINED?

-FLASH: Claire's is being pulled into Lorraine's bedroom. Claire laughs deliciously.

-FLASH: Hands putting pearls on Claire.

INT: LORRAINE'S BEDROOM CONTINUOUS

CLAIRE

What is this?

THIAGO

Mrs. Walters, accepting the Pulitzer for "Shadows of Betrayal." Quite the accomplishment, wouldn't you agree?

CLAIRE

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

THIAGO

Perhaps you would like a copy of LIFE Magazine? Easier to read and you can look at the pictures.

CLAIRE

Well, no accounting for taste. I didn't like it.

Claire picks up a bottle of Chanel No 5.

THIAGO

Careful, Miss Bennett. That scent carries weight. You wouldn't want it crushing you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

I thought you were here to assist,
Thiago, not critique.

THIAGO

Assist? Yes. I keep this house running
smoothly. That includes ensuring the
wrong things—and people—don't linger
where they shouldn't.

CLAIRE

How noble. And here I thought you were
just the help.

Thiago's expression darkens slightly, but he remains
composed.

THIAGO

You're an ambitious one. But ambition
without footing? Dangerous. Like
playing dress-up with someone else's
life.

Claire places the perfume bottle back deliberately and turns
to face him fully.

CLAIRE

If ambition is dangerous, Thiago,
what's your excuse? I see the way you
watch. Always lurking, always judging.
You don't run this house—you cling to
it.

Thiago straightens, his casual demeanor slipping.

THIAGO

You waltz in here with your cheap shoes
and big dreams, thinking you can take a
place that doesn't belong to you.

CLAIRE

Maybe it doesn't belong to me—yet.

She steps closer to him, her confidence building.

CLAIRE

You know what I see when I look at this
room? Potential. Not just for me—but
for anyone bold enough to claim it.

Claire reaches for the pearls on the dresser, lifting them
delicately.

FLASH CUTS - REAL OR IMAGINED?

-FLASH: Hands putting pearls on Claire.

THIAGO

Claim it? Like you could claim those pearls you're touching?

CLAIRE

They're beautiful, aren't they?

THIAGO

Careful, Miss Bennett. Pearls don't belong in bargain bins.

She puts the pearls on, standing tall. For the first time, she looks like she belongs in the room.

CLAIRE

What do you think, Thiago? Do they suit me?

Thiago's smirk falters for a moment. There's a flicker of acknowledgment in his eyes before his mask returns.

Thiago steps closer, lowering his voice.

THIAGO

You've got fire, but fire burns out quickly when it's not fed.

Claire doesn't flinch. She holds his gaze.

CLAIRE

Then it's a good thing I don't plan to burn out.

She turns away, adjusting the pearls in the mirror, her reflection bold and unshaken.

THIAGO

We'll see. 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?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

I am not sure.

THIAGO

Hmmm. Seems you are not sure about most things. Strange, isn't it? So much uncertainty for someone who attends to Mr. Walters'...needs. 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

Try not to take anything else. I see everything that happens in this house.

As Thiago leaves, Claire lets out a slow, steady breath. She goes into the other room and she sees 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 Marylin Monroe movie any day.

Claire fingers through shades of lipsticks and picks out a blush pink and applies it.

CLAIRE

She doesn't deserve him. She never did. But I can give him what she never could. That baron tree-of-a-wife. All roots and no fruit. I've been in the shadows too long. But not anymore.

Claire finds a slinky black jumpsuit. She sees a photo of Lorraine with her hair in a French Twist.

CLAIRE

Now this is more like it.

Claire picks up a photo of Lorraine on the dresser. She then throws it in a trashcan. A quiet laugh escapes her lips. She smooths the fabric of the jumpsuit, adjusting the neckline, owning it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Her eyes land on Lorraine's personalized stationery. Heavy, expensive paper. A gold-tipped pen rests nearby.

A pause. Claire sits. Picks up the pen. The ink glides across the paper—deliberate, smooth, intimate.

CLOSE-UP: THE NOTE IS SHORT. SIMPLE. A SINGLE LINE.

"No one will ever love you like I do."

She folds the note neatly and places it where Lorraine will surely find it.

A lingering moment. Claire presses her fingers over the ink, as if sealing the words into existence.

Then—she walks away, leaving the note behind.

This scene fades as Claire hums a tune. The thunder and rain rage on, outside.

INT: THE STUDY A LITTLE 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 & THIAGO

Get a bee in her bonnet.

They both laugh.

BRYCE

Yes, she will be here often I believe.

THIAGO

Sir, Miss Bennett. I don't like her

BRYCE

Claire. Thiago, use her first name.

THIAGO

Claire, yes sir. I called my man at the police station, he is running a check on her for me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BRYCE

Thiago, relax. No need to check up on Claire.

THIAGO

No sir, not at all.

BRYCE

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

Thunder rumbles, lightning flickers, and the rain beats heavily against the windows. Claire enters the study, transformed.

Her hair is swept up into a polished French twist, her walk slow and deliberate, draped in Lorraine's pearls.

She looks every bit like the mistress of the house, gliding in like royalty. Thiago stands by, watching her disdain.

Claire picks up the second glass of brandy from the table and turns slowly toward Thiago, waiving him off with a graceful hand.

CLAIRE

That will be all, Thiago. Give us a 15-minute call before dinner—Mr. Walters and I have...business to attend to.

THIAGO

Of course, Miss Bennett. Or is it Mrs. Walters already? My apologies, I lose track of who's who in this house sometimes.

CLAIRE

That's understandable. It must be exhausting trying to keep up with people who are out of your league.

BRYCE

Oh, Thiago, always stirring things up. Let's push dinner till 7:45.

THIAGO

Out of my league? Miss Bennett, you've barely made it into the game. Borrowed pearls and stolen perfume don't make you a queen, they make you a thief.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CLAIRE

Bryce, Thiago thought that I was a hitchhiker that you took kindness on during the rain.

CLAIRE

Isn't that right, Thiago? Oh, or maybe I just flashed my legs.

BRYCE

That'll be enough for now, Thiago. Thank you.

Thiago goes to leave.

CLAIRE

Funny. I thought the help was supposed to serve without question, not critique their betters.

Thiago stops and turns and glares at Claire.

THIAGO

Betters? Oh, Miss Bennett, I don't serve you. I observe you. And what I see is a little girl playing dress-up in someone else's life.

BRYCE

Ok you two, let's leave the storm outside.

THIAGO

Dinner at 745...Cook will kill me.

Thiago leaves.

BRYCE

Don't mind him. He likes to think he runs this house.

CLAIRE

I suppose every house needs a watchdog.

Bryce chuckles, but Claire's eyes drift to the rain outside. For a moment, her confident façade slips, revealing the weight of what she's up against. As Bryce pours another drink, Claire straightens, reclaiming her poise. She takes another sip of brandy, her reflection in the window more determined than ever.

BRYCE

Well, look at you. Pearls, too? Do you always travel with such accessories?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Claire pulls Bryce in for a kiss. Bryce indulges and as they kiss he notices the Chanel No.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. Bryce and Claire moan and make love. The scene fades.

INT. LORRAINE'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Lorraine stands by the vanity, the note in her hands. Her eyes flick across the words. Her expression unreadable.

A slow inhale. A flicker of a smile? A hint of sadness? A suppressed laugh?

SHE READS THE NOTE ALOUD TO THE CAMERA:

LORRAINE

No one will ever love you like I do.

A beat. Does she read it as a promise, a warning, or a confession? She tucks the note away, close to her chest. Holding onto it, but why?

INT: 6 WEEKS LATER IN LORRAINE'S BEDROOM

The room is softly lit, a blend of elegance and warmth, but with an undercurrent of something unsettled. Lorraine stands at her vanity, a vision of grace and poise. Her reflection stares back, calm but calculating. She applies lipstick with precision, the faint hint of a storm brewing behind her eyes.

Bryce enters casually, but there's a charge in the air between them.

Lorraine's exterior is polished and composed, but she's clearly aware of something beneath the surface. She is testing Bryce with subtle precision, her questions laced with quiet suspicion.

LORRAINE

Bryce, have you seen my pearls? They seem to have vanished.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE

If you wore them, they must be here.
Did you leave them at the other house?

LORRAINE

Not that I know of. So, Thiago gave me
some interesting news today.

Lorraine rises gracefully and crosses to him, placing a hand
on his chest. She kisses him, slow and deliberate, testing
his reaction.

Bryce looks on, no change in his emotion.

Lorraine picks up the black onyx strand of pearls and puts
them on.

LORRAINE

Said your girl has a complicated past.
What do you think, too dark?

BRYCE

Too dark for the woman that wrote
"*Shadows of Betrayal*" You're perfect.
Thiago like to stir up trouble.

LORRAINE

Perhaps. But his man at the station
mentioned a few... incidents. What's
her name again? Connie?

He starts to sound irritated. Lorraine is pushing a subject
he doesn't want to engage in.

BRYCE

Claire. Her name is Claire.

LORRAINE

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

BRYCE

Maybe Fiona moved the perfume while
cleaning?

LORRAINE

As long as you checked. Don't want to
bring trouble into our rather public
lives.

BRYCE

I checked her background myself. She's
fine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Lorraine studies him for a beat, her gaze penetrating but not accusing.

LORRAINE

Good. I don't want any trouble.

She adjusts her dress in the mirror, then picks up her journal from the vanity and flips it open, her pen poised.

LORRAINE

Scandals belong in my novels, not in this house.

BRYCE

Yes dear!

LORRAINE

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?

LORRAINE

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.

LORRAINE

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!

LORRAINE

Yes, but I was raised

BRYCE & LORRAINE

Not to let anyone do what I could do myself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BRYCE

I love you, Lolly.

They both laugh. Lorraine kisses Bryce on the cheek. As she reaches the doorway, she pauses, her hand resting on the frame. She turns back to face Bryce, her expression still calm, but her eyes sharpen slightly, locking on his.

LORRAINE

Bryce, there is something that I've been meaning to mention.

BRYCE

What is it?

LORRAINE

Over the years, I've learned that secrets have a way of surfacing. Especially...when there's another woman involved.

BRYCE

Lolly, what are you talking about? You know me.

Her voice is calm, measured, but each word lands like a blow.

LORRAINE

I do. That's why I'm saying this. If there was ever...let's say... something on the side, it would be wise to end it before things get messy.

BRYCE

There's no one else.

LORRAINE

Good. You're smarter than that, Bryce.

She lets the silence hang for a beat.

LORRAINE

But if there *was something*, make sure it's finished. Bryce...if you were to have something on the side, say a substitute, than be done with her.

BRYCE

Lolly you have nothing to worry about.

LORRAINE

Good. Now I must go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

She blows a kiss to Bryce and leaves.

INT. WALTERS ESTATE - LORRAINE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bryce watches the doorway where Lorraine just exited. His composure cracks for a brief moment as he exhales sharply, then crosses to the phone on the desk. He picks it up and dials Claire.

BRYCE

What are you doing?

INTERCUT WITH: INT. CLAIRE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Claire lounges on her modest sofa, a glass of wine in hand. She smirks as she hears his voice. Claire looks at herself in the cracked mirror. Claire lets her fingers linger over the heart locket around her neck.

CLAIRE

Nothing, Boss Man. What do you need?

BRYCE

I'm sending the car. We have work to do.

CLAIRE

At this hour? On a Friday?

She pauses, her voice dipping into a playful tone.

CLAIRE

What should I wear?

BRYCE

The pearls. Just the pearls.

A beat. Claire's smirk deepens, her voice low and teasing.

CLAIRE

Oh, you wicked man.

INT: LORRAINE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

They hang up. Bryce exhales again, smoothing his tie as if regaining his composure.

Thunder rumbles outside, louder now, as lightning illuminates the room in a brief, blinding flash. Bryce lingers in the charged silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE

Thiago! Have the car pick up Miss Bennett. Tell Cook to prepare the beef stroganoff.

EXT. UPSCALE APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Heavy rain drenches the city as Lorraine arrives at the upscale apartment building. She steps out of her car with effortless grace, her raincoat shielding her from the storm. Despite the rain, she exudes the poise of a woman who commands her world, even as it threatens to crumble.

INT. ASHFORD PENTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The elevator doors open to reveal Caroline, her arms outstretched for a warm hug. The penthouse is stylish and inviting, but an unspoken tension hangs in the air.

CAROLINE

Lolly, I don't understand why you insist on driving yourself in this weather.

LORRAINE

I like to be in control.

CAROLINE & LORRAINE

(in unison)

I like to be in control.

They share a brief laugh, but Caroline's eyes betray her concern.

ASHFORD WATERS, in his early 50s, is the epitome of old-money sophistication, exuding charm and wit with every word. A partner in a prestigious law firm and the husband of the flamboyant Caroline, Ashford is a man who thrives in the glittering world of high society. Beneath his polished exterior lies a sharp legal mind and a sardonic sense of humor, often used to diffuse tension or subtly expose truths others would prefer to keep hidden.

Ashford appears, all charm and energy, ushering the women inside.

ASHFORD

My two favorite dames!

The Ladies sing a playful line from South Pacific.

CAROLINE & LORRAINE

"There is nothing like a dame."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASHFORD

See? Marvelous! You two could have taken Hollywood by storm. Now come in. I've made a batch of my famous Vesper Martinis.

LORRAINE

How very Ian Fleming of you. *Casino Royale*—that book would make a splendid film.

ASHFORD

Lolly, maybe one of your novels will be next. *Shadows of Betrayal*—I can see Randolph Scott in the lead.

LORRAINE

Only if you secure the contract, Ash.

Ashford pours the drinks, and they toast with rehearsed elegance.

ASHFORD & CAROLINE

To *Shadows of Betrayal*!

Caroline sets her glass down, her tone turning serious.

CAROLINE

Lolly, sit for a moment.

LORRAINE

Just a moment—we can't be late for the event.

ASHFORD

The driver will get us there on time. But there's something we need to discuss.

Lorraine hesitates, sensing the shift. She lowers herself gracefully into a chair, her back straight, her gaze steady.

LORRAINE

What is it? Are you both all right?

CAROLINE

Yes, we're fine. This is about Bryce.

Lorraine's expression doesn't change, but her grip on the glass tightens slightly.

LORRAINE

Go on.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CAROLINE

He's having an affair.

Lorraine takes a deliberate sip of her martini.

LORRAINE

Please. That doesn't rattle my cage.

CAROLINE

You knew?

LORRAINE

I've had my suspicions. Welcome to the real story.

Ashford and Caroline exchange uneasy glances.

ASHFORD

The real story?

LORRAINE

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

CAROLINE

Lolly, what does that mean?

Lorraine rises, smoothing her skirt with precision.

LORRAINE

It means we don't waste time on things that don't matter.

CAROLINE

Not matter? Lolly, this isn't nothing—it's your marriage.

Lorraine turns sharply, her voice calm but with a dangerous undercurrent.

LORRAINE

And it's my life, Caroline. I will handle it as I see fit.

She glances at Ashford, her tone softening slightly.

LORRAINE

Ash, is the car ready?

ASHFORD

Yes. Are you sure you're all right?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LORRAINE

Life is a tough racket, Ash. But, I've survived worse.

She finishes her martini in a single, deliberate motion and sets the glass down.

LORRAINE

Shall we?

Thunder cracks loudly outside, and lightning illuminates the room. Lorraine's expression remains composed.

EXT. WALTERS ESTATE - NIGHT

The rain pours relentlessly as a sleek black car pulls into the driveway. The driver steps out, umbrella in hand, and opens the back door. Claire emerges, her raincoat cinched tightly at the waist. Pearls glint from beneath her collar, and her heels click sharply against the wet pavement.

CLAIRE

(to the driver, softly)

Thank you.

She glances toward the estate, her presence feels like a storm rolling in, silent, but inevitable.

INT. WALTERS ESTATE - FOYER - NIGHT

The heavy rain pounds against the grand estate, thunder rolling in the distance. Inside, Thiago waits at the entrance, his posture rigid, his eyes sharp. The sound of Claire's heels echoes as she steps inside, her raincoat dripping water onto the polished floor.

She moves with deliberate grace, like a predator entering unfamiliar territory.

THIAGO

Miss Bennett. Look what the storm dragged in.

CLAIRE

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

Thiago smirks, his gaze cold and unyielding.

THIAGO

You've certainly stirred up a... breeze. Those pearls—so striking. They seem almost...familiar. Can I take your coat?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

No, I'll keep on it. Don't want your grimy hands on my things.

She steps past him, dismissing his presence with a flick of her rain-soaked hair.

INT. WALTERS ESTATE - LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Bryce sits in the dimly lit library, a glass of brandy in hand. He stands as Claire enters, her presence magnetic despite her damp appearance. The pearls glinting under the warm light. Bryce's face softens, his usual confidence momentarily slipping into something warmer.

BRYCE

Claire.

CLAIRE

Bryce.

She steps closer, her heels clicking softly on the hardwood floor. The tension between them is palpable. Bryce moves to pour her a drink, but Claire gently places a hand on his arm, stopping him.

CLAIRE

I don't need a drink. I need...to talk to you.

Bryce hesitates, sensing the gravity in her voice.

BRYCE

You sound serious.

CLAIRE

(softly, almost a whisper)
I'm pregnant, Bryce.

For a fleeting moment, Claire doubts herself and the pregnancy. She feels overwhelmed by the idea of a child and the implications of bringing life into her carefully calculated world.

The words land like a thunderclap. Bryce's face transforms—shock giving way to a stunned joy. He steps closer, his eyes alive with possibility.

BRYCE

A child. Claire...this is everything I've ever wanted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He laughs softly, almost in disbelief. Bryce reaches for her hands, holding them tightly.

BRYCE

Do you know what this means?

Claire stares at him, her confident façade faltering. For the first time, doubt flickers across her face.

CLAIRE

Do I?

Bryce doesn't notice her hesitation; he's too caught up in his own elation.

BRYCE

We'll have a family. Someone to carry
on my name, my legacy. You and me,
Claire—this changes everything.

Claire pulls her hands away, stepping back. She touches her stomach lightly, her eyes distant.

CLAIRE

(quietly)

A family...

Her voice wavers, her thoughts racing. This wasn't part of the plan, not really. She imagined power, control, a seat at the head of the table—but not this. Not a child.

Bryce steps closer, misreading her hesitation as something else entirely.

BRYCE

I know it's a lot, but we can do this.
Together. I've wanted this for so long.

Claire's expression tightens, her doubt shifting into something harder, colder. She looks up at Bryce, her eyes sharpening like a blade.

CLAIRE

Let's be clear, Bryce. I have no use
for little people.

Her voice cuts through the room like the crack of lightning outside. Bryce freezes, the weight of her words hitting him hard.

BRYCE

Claire?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

Children are messy. Needy. They have a way of ruining everything.

She steps closer to him, reclaiming the space between them, her confidence returning with every word.

CLAIRE

This isn't about the child. This is about us. What we can build. What we can take.

Bryce's joy falters, replaced by the dawning realization of what her announcement truly means—not a shared dream, but another calculated move.

BRYCE

You don't want this child, do you?

CLAIRE

I didn't say that. What I want is everything. You said it yourself, Bryce—a legacy. The Walters name, the house, the life.

She leans in, her voice dropping to a whisper.

CLAIRE

But don't mistake me for someone who's going to fawn over some screaming little person. This is your wish, Bryce. Not mine.

Bryce exhales sharply, the weight of her words sinking in. The joy on his face is replaced by something darker—uncertainty, even fear.

BRYCE

I thought/

CLAIRE

You thought I'd be your perfect little wife? The doting mother? Bryce, darling, that's not who I am.

INT. WALTERS ESTATE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

From the shadows, Thiago watches from the library door.

INT. WALTERS ESTATE - LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Bryce moves to kiss Claire, but she steps back slightly, her hand trailing down his chest.

CLAIRE
Bryce, if we're going to do this, it has to be right.

BRYCE
It will be. I'll make sure of it.

CLAIRE
(slowly, deliberately)
That means leaving her.

Bryce freezes, the words hitting him like ice water.

BRYCE
Claire?

Claire places finger on his lips.

CLAIRE
Shh.

Her tone softens, but her eyes remain steely, unwavering.

CLAIRE
You want a family. I can give you that.
But only if it's just us. No shadows,
no substitutes.

Bryce exhales deeply, the weight of her words pressing on him. He doesn't respond, but his silence speaks volumes.

INT. WALTERS ESTATE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Thiago's face hardens as he steps away from the door.

THIAGO
A substitute wife with a bargain-
basement soul.

INT. WALTERS ESTATE - LIBRARY

Claire with her back to the camera drops her raincoat to reveal she is naked except for the pearls. She steps out of her heels.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Dressed for work as you requested.
Just the pearls.

Bryce gives a low moan. 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.

INT. WALTERS ESTATE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Thiago sees this entire scene. He speaks aloud but only to himself. Bryce and Claire do not hear him.

THIAGO

I see you, Miss Bennett. I see everything.

EXT. WALTERS ESTATE - DECK - SUMMER MORNING -
6-WEEKS LATER

The lush estate basks in the golden glow of late summer, but the air between Lorraine and Bryce carries a subtle tension. Thiago moves gracefully, pouring coffee with precision. There is a radio and the announcer is heard:

ANNOUNCER

Last night a fire broke out in West Hollywood. A warehouse was destroyed and the dental offices of the long-time family practice, Dr. Billy Wertz and Son. Dr. Wertz was known as "the dentist to the stars!" The entire facility was destroyed. All records were lost.

Lorraine turns off the radio.

THIAGO

More coffee, Miss Lolly?

LORRAINE

Yes, thank you, Thiago.

BRYCE

Lolly, wasn't that your dentist, Dr. Billy Wertz?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LORRAINE

Yes, my only dentist, my whole life.
Well, I will have to find a new one.
Start over. Good thing I have no
cavities!

She turns her attention to Bryce, her tone casual, but her words calculated.

LORRAINE

Bryce, I could use some help for a few
months. Your girl—what's her name
again? Connie? Shelly?

THIAGO

Claire Bennett, Miss Lolly.

Lorraine glances at Thiago, intrigued.

LORRAINE

Claire. Yes.

Thiago hesitates, then adds with a measured tone.

THIAGO

My man has more news on her.

BRYCE

(interjecting quickly)
Now, now, Lolly, why indulge gossip?

LORRAINE

Gossip? Thiago, what do you mean—news?

Thiago's expression remains cool, but his words carry a subtle sting.

THIAGO

Bargain basement.

BRYCE

Thiago!

Lorraine raises an eyebrow, her curiosity deepening.

LORRAINE

Bargain basement? That's vivid. What
exactly does that mean, Thiago?

THIAGO

Pretends a lot. Takes on airs. Like
she's trying on a dress at Woolworth's.
I think she's cheap. She thinks she's
expensive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Lorraine sits back, mulling over the comment. Bryce glances away.

LORRAINE

Bryce, what do you think?

Bryce shifts in his chair, choosing his words carefully.

BRYCE

Miss Bennett is a hard worker. Keeps me organized, on point.

LORRAINE

Good. Then send her to the Mountain House tomorrow. I'll get her up to speed on my fan mail, contracts, and my new novel.

Bryce hesitates, his expression guarded.

BRYCE

You want Claire to work for you?

LORRAINE

Yes. If she's as capable as you say, let's see what she can do.

She leans forward, her gaze sharpening.

LORRAINE

And I want to keep an eye on her.

BRYCE

An eye?

LORRAINE

There's something *interesting* about her. I want to figure it out.

Bryce exhales, nodding reluctantly.

BRYCE

Fine. She'll meet you at the Mountain House at ten.

LORRAINE

Excellent. We'll work until five, then I'm off to San Diego for the meeting and book signing. I'll stay overnight and return Monday.

BRYCE

Another night away? What will I do with myself?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Lorraine smirks.

LORRAINE

Stay out of trouble.

Thiago raises an eyebrow, and Bryce catches it.

Lorraine reaches for her notebook, jotting something down.

BRYCE

What are you writing?

LORRAINE

"Bargain basement." That is such a vivid phrase. I might use it.

Lorraine rises gracefully, planting a light kiss on Bryce's cheek.

LORRAINE

Such a love.

She exits, leaving Bryce and Thiago alone.

Thiago watches Lorraine disappear, then turns to Bryce.

THIAGO

Sir, I don't have a good feeling about her.

Bryce sighs, rubbing the back of his neck as he heads to the house.

BRYCE

Thiago, I know.

INT. WALTERS ESTATE - LIBRARY

Bryce enters the house and breezes into the library and picks up the phone. He calls Claire.

The storm begins to roll in, thunder rumbling faintly in the distance. Bryce's voice is low, measured.

BRYCE

Claire, new assignment. I'll send the car to pick you up at three-thirty.

A pause, his tone softening with a faint smirk.

BRYCE

And this time...wear clothes.

INT. STUDY AT WALTERS ESTATE - 4 PM

The thunder rolls ominously, the storm brewing outside. Bryce paces the study, tension etched into every step. The door opens, and Claire strides in, her presence magnetic. She leans into Bryce, planting a slow, deliberate kiss.

Bryce returns it briefly, distracted, then resumes pacing.

CLAIRE

Well, that's not quite the greeting I expected.

BRYCE

We've got to talk.

Bryce stops, turning to her sharply.

BRYCE

Thiago has been digging into your past.

CLAIRE

Let him look all he wants. That manservant fancies himself a detective.

BRYCE

Lorraine's requested you as her assistant for the next few months.

Claire freezes for a fraction of a second, her eyes narrowing.

CLAIRE

Lorraine wants me?

BRYCE

Specifically. She says she needs the help.

CLAIRE

And you think this is a good idea?

BRYCE

She's my wife, Claire.

CLAIRE

You keep reminding me.

BRYCE

Look, just be cool. Do the job, and keep things under control.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Control? I thought that's what I was here for.

Bryce exhales, rubbing the back of his neck.

BRYCE

This will keep the peace.

CLAIRE

The peace? Bryce, honey, your wife is inviting me into the lion's den.

BRYCE

You can handle this.

Claire turns away.

CLAIRE

(muttering)

This wasn't part of the plan.

BRYCE

What?

Claire spins around, her composure snapping back into place.

CLAIRE

I didn't sign up to be anyone's lapdog.

BRYCE

And you won't be. You're the one holding all the cards, Claire.

CLAIRE

(smiling)

Damn right I am.

She steps closer, her voice slow and measured.

CLAIRE

And if you expect me to play nice, you'd better make sure I have what I need.

BRYCE

You'll be taken care of.

CLAIRE

(softly, dangerously)

Oh, I know I will. But I'm not just talking about money.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

A loud clap of thunder shakes the room, followed by the crackle of lightning. The lights flicker before going out, plunging the room into dim, stormy shadows.

Bryce pulls Claire into a kiss, his desperation palpable. She meets him halfway, her eyes open and calculating even as her lips press against his.

The door opens. Thiago steps in. Bryce, his back to the door, doesn't notice, but Claire sees him instantly.

Claire breaks the kiss just enough to glance at Thiago, and she lifts a single finger in a dismissive wave. Thiago holds her gaze for a beat, then steps back, closing the door silently behind him.

THIAGO

Miss Bennett, your web is getting crowded.

The rain begins to pour, its relentless rhythm echoing through the room. Bryce picks Claire up, carrying her toward the couch as the storm rages outside.

INT. MOUNTAIN ESTATE - MORNING

The sun filters through the large windows of Lorraine's mountain estate. Lorraine stands by the window, sipping coffee, dressed casually but impeccably, like Jackie Kennedy on a serene Sunday morning. Her calm demeanor radiates control.

Claire's confidence is shaken as Lorraine exerts subtle dominance, making it clear that she is still in control despite Claire's manipulations. Claire works to regain her footing, using the pearls and perfume as symbols of the life she's determined to take.

There's a knock at the door. Lorraine sets her coffee down and opens it to reveal Claire, poised in a tailored business suit. Claire steps in confidently, offering a firm handshake.

Lorraine pulls Claire in for a hug.

ANGLE ON CLAIRE CLOSING HER EYES AND BREATHING IN.

LORRAINE

Claire Bennett. Come in.

She takes a measured moment to look Claire over, her expression pleasant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LORRAINE

Bryce speaks highly of you. Says you're indispensable these days.

CLAIRE

I just try to keep things organized. Bryce—Mr. Walters—is quite a busy man.

LORRAINE

Yes, he is. Sometimes I wonder if he's too busy. Do you ever feel that way, Claire?

CLAIRE

Bryce is very committed. To his work, of course.

LORRAINE

Commitment is the cornerstone of any successful...partnership. Don't you agree?

CLAIRE

Ambition is important. It drives us to succeed. But loyalty—loyalty is what holds everything together.

LORRAINE

Loyalty. I like that. You can call me Lolly. And I should apologize, Bryce didn't tell you about the dress code. We're very casual here. Tomorrow, slacks and a sweater will do.

Claire nods.

CLAIRE

Thank you. I'll make sure to adjust.

Lorraine leads Claire to the desk, stacked with letters. She gestures for Claire to sit.

LORRAINE

Thank you for taking on this task. I need someone who can match my pace—completely in sync. Can you manage that?

CLAIRE

I'm confident I can.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LORRAINE

Good. I hear you're a take-charge woman. Bryce says you're invaluable. Even Thiago seems intrigued by you.

CLAIRE

Thiago? Intrigued? That's flattering. And as for Mr. Walters, I make sure he has everything he needs.

LORRAINE

He's certainly more productive with you around. Thank you for that.

CLAIRE

Anything I can do to help. Your home is lovely. I'd love a place like this someday.

LORRAINE

Three words, Claire. Magic. Miraculous. Limitless.

Claire is quickly trying to outthink and out wit Lorraine. This new thought is foreign to her and she wants to quickly be "up-to-speed."

CLAIRE

I'm not sure I understand.

LORRAINE

Magic-believe that surprises and energy are always around you. Miraculous-see your future clearly. Limitless-ask for what you want. The universe can't read your mind.

CLAIRE

That simple?

LORRAINE

Not at all. It takes work. Focus. Effort. My father always said, "Never rise to power on the backs of others. Success comes from your own work."

Claire hesitates.

CLAIRE

Interesting. I'll think on that.

LORRAINE

Good. Let's get started.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Lorraine motions to the stack of letters on the desk.

LORRAINE

These are from the past three weeks.
Sort them into four categories: 1)
Thank you. 2) Budding writers. 3)
When's the next novel? 4) Can we meet?
Once sorted, prepare responses.

Claire's eyes widen slightly at the sheer volume but quickly hides her reaction.

CLAIRE

I'm a quick study. I've got it.

INT. MOUNTAIN ESTATE LATER - AFTERNOON

Thunder rumbles faintly as Claire works through the letters. She pauses, looking out the window at the steep road leading down the mountain.

CLAIRE

Treacherous. One wrong move and you're off the edge.

Lorraine enters quietly, catching Claire's words.

LORRAINE

Claire, who are you talking to?

CLAIRE

(startled)
Oh, just admiring the view. That road looks dangerous.

LORRAINE

I know every turn by heart. It's only dangerous if you're reckless.

She crosses to the desk and pulls out a blank piece of paper.

LORRAINE

Now, for the next step. You'll be signing responses with my signature.

She demonstrates, her signature bold and distinct, the sweeping "L" dominating the page.

POV: The Screen Fills With Lorraine's Handwriting—A Signature So Effortless, It Looks Like Art.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LORRAINE

It's all about the flow. No hesitation.

CLOSE-UP: Claire's fingers tighten slightly on the desk—an unconscious hunger for what that name represents.

CLAIRE
(softly)

Teach me.

A slight smirk from Lorraine. She steps behind Claire. Close. Too close. The air between them barely exists.

-THE TOUCH—SLOW, DELIBERATE

Lorraine's hand presses gently against Claire's back, guiding her forward. Fingers slide down, resting lightly on Claire's wrist. A pause. Then, Lorraine's fingers wrap around Claire's hand, positioning the pen.

-THE MOVEMENT—INTIMATE, CONTROLLED

They move as one. Lorraine's hand on Claire's, the pen gliding over the page. Slow. Intentional. A name forms—perfect, identical. Lorraine's name, in Claire's hand.

-CLOSE-UP: Claire's breath catches—was it from the thrill of deception, or from Lorraine's touch?

LORRAINE
(whisper)

Again.

Claire inhales, steadying herself, and signs again—more confident this time. Lorraine's hand lingers on hers a moment too long.

-A PEN DROPS. IT ROLLS ACROSS THE SCREEN.

Claire stares at the ink. Her heart pounds. She just became someone else.

LORRAINE
It's all in the flair. Practice it until it's perfect.

Claire sits, carefully mimicking the signature. Lorraine watches, her expression calm but observant.

CLAIRE
You want me to become you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LORRAINE
(laughing lightly)
Only on paper.

Lorraine leaves.

POV on screen shows Claire writing Lorraine's perfect signature, letter after letter.

INT. STUDY AT WALTERS ESTATE - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

CLAIRE
I become you...

The storm brews outside, thunder rolling faintly in the distance. Claire sits at the desk, the weight of the day visible on her face.

Thiago steps into the room, his presence commanding and unnervingly calm.

THIAGO
Miss Bennett, talking to yourself again? Or rehearsing for your next performance?

Claire glances up sharply. Startled, her hand knocks the teacup onto the floor. The shattered sound echoes louder than it should.

CLAIRE
Always watching, aren't you, Thiago?
You should take up a hobby.

Thiago crosses the room slowly, his eyes flicking to the shattered teacup.

THIAGO
Careless. You'll find that broken things rarely mend the way they were.
That will be deducted from your pay.

CLAIRE
You made me drop it. Now, be useful and clean it up.

THIAGO
No.

CLAIRE
Excuse me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THIAGO

Your mess. You clean it.

He crosses behind her gripping the pearls around her neck and unclasping them with practiced ease. He sniffs and smells the perfume.

THIAGO

These don't belong to you. Neither does the perfume you've been parading around in.

Claire gasps, her hand instinctively going to her bare neck.

CLAIRE

How dare you?

THIAGO

How dare you? Pretending to be someone you're not. Borrowed pearls, stolen perfume. Trash wrapped in silk.

Claire stands, anger flaring in her eyes, but Thiago steps closer, towering over her.

CLAIRE

You're out of line.

THIAGO

No, Miss Bennett. You are. You've mistaken ambition for entitlement.

He grabs her by the back of her head, his grip firm but not cruel, and pushes her down toward the shattered cup.

THIAGO

Pick it up.

CLAIRE

You'll regret this.

THIAGO

Perhaps. But for now, you'll clean up your mess.

Claire lowers herself to the floor. She picks up the broken pieces, her hands trembling slightly at first, then steadying.

THIAGO

You should leave.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Claire is shaken. She heads to the door like a sad puppy, tail between her legs. As she reaches the door and opens it, Thiago speaks with cold intent.

THIAGO

Miss Lorraine trusted you. Mr. Walters trusted you. I see now what you really are—Bargain Basement Betty.

Claire stiffens, she turns around, now gaining her self-reliance before our eyes.

CLAIRE

Say that again.

THIAGO

Bargain Basement Betty.

For a long moment, the two lock eyes, the storm outside echoing the tension between them. Claire walks back to the desk and takes a seat.

CLAIRE

You've had your fun, Thiago. Now get out.

THIAGO

Not yet. Miss Lorraine said I should take the letters to the post office. Are they ready?

Claire takes a moment, then gestures to the neatly sorted and signed stack on the desk.

CLAIRE

Of course. Take them.

Thiago picks up the letters, glancing at the sheet of paper where Claire has been practicing Lorraine's signature.

THIAGO

Not bad. You're almost convincing.

Claire smirks, the fire in her eyes returning.

CLAIRE

Glad to know I'm meeting your high standards.

THIAGO

Oh, I'm sure Act II will be even better.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

He turns to leave but pauses at the door. He then spies her purse and returns to retrieve it.

 THIAGO
The bottle.

 CLAIRE
What bottle?

 THIAGO
The Chanel No. 5. In your purse. It's
wasted on someone like you.

He strides back to the desk, snatches her purse, and removes the bottle of perfume. Claire doesn't flinch, her gaze locked on him.

 THIAGO
Careful, Miss Bennett. You're playing a
dangerous game.

 CLAIRE
Neither danger nor you scare me,
Thiago.

 THIAGO
 (smiling coldly)
Missy, I'm not trying to scare you. I
haven't even started.

He gestures to the door.

 THIAGO
You're done for the day. I'll let Miss
Lorraine know you needed time to
reflect.

Claire gathers her belongings with deliberate movements, refusing to let him see her shaken. She walks to the door, pauses briefly, then steps outside into the storm.

EXT. WALTERS ESTATE - DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The thunder cracks loudly as Claire climbs into her car. She grips the steering wheel tightly, her knuckles white, but her breathing slows as a determined look takes over her face.

She starts the car and drives down the winding road as the rain begins to fall harder.

 CLAIRE
You don't win, Thiago. Not today.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INT: THE STUDY AT THE WALTERS ESTATE One month later.

7pm. Dusk is falling. Bryce and Claire are in the study. They are kissing on the couch. She interrupts their kissing. Bryce continues to kiss her while talks, trying to distract her. He is playful.

CLAIRE

I deserve my strand.

Bryce is trying to get back to kissing.

BRYCE

Strand?

CLAIRE

Pearls. My own strand of pearls.

BRYCE

Yes you shall get a strand.

CLAIRE

A double strand. I want more.

BRYCE

(smirking)

Doesn't everyone?

Claire stands, pacing as her tone shifts, more pointed.

CLAIRE

She's going to figure this out, Bryce. Lorraine is not stupid.

BRYCE

You worry too much. Lorraine has her head buried in her books, always off on some literary adventure. We're safe.

CLAIRE

I have a plan.

BRYCE

You have a plan?

CLAIRE

Don't worry about the details, Bryce. Just know that soon, she won't be in our way. We'll have everything we've ever wanted. I need to know that you're serious. I can't be your little secret forever.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BRYCE

You won't. Trust me. Now come sit back down.

CLAIRE

When?

BRYCE

When what?

CLAIRE

The pearls. When will I get them?

BRYCE

Right as rain, you shall have your pearls.

CLAIRE

And?

BRYCE

And? Oh there is more?

Bryce laughs. Claire steady. Claire breaks away.

CLAIRE

I am not joking. There is more.

BRYCE

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

CLAIRE

No! Not him.

Lorraine, Caroline, Ashford and Thiago enter in a burst of conversation, not yet aware that Claire and Bryce are in a conversation. Their laughter is a sharp contrast to the conversation with Bryce and Claire.

ASHFORD

Lolly you are so clever!

CAROLINE

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

CLAIRE

Bennett, the name is Bennett. No all is fine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LORRAINE

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 a sharp "no."

LORRAINE

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

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.

LORRAINE

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!

LORRAINE

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 you said.

ASHFORD

Oh! Parlor games! I love parlor games!

CAROLINE

Count me in! Ok Miss Bradley.

CLAIRE

Bennett. The name is Bennett.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

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.

CLAIRE

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

CAROLINE

Ash, I told you not to mention this.

LORRAINE

Now we have three mysteries at the same time! I do love parlor games.

CLAIRE

Mr. Waters what is your question?

ASHFORD

Well, it seems to me like you are pregnant.

Claire is bland if not cold with her "yes" responses. These blend to the background for a moment with the drama with Lorraine.

CLAIRE

Yes.

CAROLINE

How did you get pregnant?

CLAIRE

Yes.

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

LORRAINE

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Lorraine leaves. The room is quiet for a moment.

CLAIRE

Yes.

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.

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

Miss Bennett, you sound like a broken record! 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."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

CLAIRE

I was just answering Mr. Waters question. No-one seems to care for my responses. All wrapped up in Lolly. Oh is she ok? Oh did the word "pregnant" get her upset.

CAROLINE

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

Claire responds coolly.

CLAIRE

Yes. Yes. Yes.

CAROLINE groans and leaves. Awkward silence.

ASHFORD

Well, this is awkward.

CLAIRE

Yes.

Ashford moves within inches of Claire.

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.

BRYCE

Ash, my God man. 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?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

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?

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

ASHFORD

Because they always follow the dame's direction.

Silence in the room. Then 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.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

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.

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.

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

LORRAINE

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

BRYCE

Ash said to tell you he was sorry.

LORRAINE

There's nothing to apologize for. My
feelings are my own business. Bryce, is
there something you want to tell me?

BRYCE

All is good.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

LORRAINE

Bryce, I love you. I cannot give you children. But will it ever be enough? Will I ever feel whole again?

BRYCE

Whatever the future holds, we'll face it side by side. You're not alone in this, Lorraine. We'll find our way, even if it's different from what we imagined.

LORRAINE

I suppose. Goodnight.

She exits. Bryce turns to the window, his reflection barely visible against the storm outside.

INT: THE MOUNTAIN HOUSE LIVING ROOM 2 MONTHS LATER

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

Careful, Bryce. Mysteries have a way of leading to trouble. And I don't like this sneaking around. I have you for moments and she gets all the memories.

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

CLAIRE

My my. Black Pearls. I thought you forgot.

BRYCE

No, I wanted to find the perfect strand for you.

Bryce puts the pearls on Claire.

BRYCE

Perfect.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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, 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.

BRYCE

Are you taking the vitamins the doctor prescribed?

CLAIRE

I do love these pearls. Jewelry is never the wrong size.

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. I have plans. But I assure you, this baby isn't at the center of them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BRYCE

What are you talking about? This is our child, Claire. Our future

CLAIRE

The pearls are lovely. Our child? No, Bryce. This... this thing growing inside me is nothing more than a byproduct of our little arrangement. A means to an end. But it's certainly not part of my future. Just be sure to have a nanny or someone to do the work because I have no interest in little people.

BRYCE

This is our baby, our flesh and blood. You can't just dismiss this.

CLAIRE

Dismiss it? Oh, Bryce, you still don't understand, do you? I never wanted this child. What I want is what I've always wanted: the money, the power, the life that you promised me. More. I want MORE.

BRYCE

You're talking about our baby, Claire. How can you be so cold?

CLAIRE

Cold? No, Bryce. I'm realistic. I see things as they are. This baby is just baggage, something to be dealt with and discarded once it's served its purpose. But make no mistake, Bryce, this child is not part of my future. I'll do what's necessary to secure my place in your world. And nothing will stand in my way.

Bryce kisses Claire quickly and then turns to leave. She tenderly caresses the pearls.

Claire goes in front of a mirror. Admires herself and the pearls. POV: She sees in the mirror a woman of grace, style and beauty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CLAIRE

I do want everything.

INT. MOUNTAIN HOUSE - STUDY - 1 PM

Claire sits by the window, her hands wrapped around a cup of tea. Lorraine enters, holding a large box. She is effortlessly composed, her every movement deliberate.

Lorraine exudes calm dominance, offering veiled observations and questions that unsettle Claire. Her composure never wavers, but her words carry a quiet strength that asserts her power.

LORRAINE

Claire! How are you today? So much to discuss.

CLAIRE

Lolly, would you like some tea? I have the kettle on.

LORRAINE

I'd love a cup.

Claire starts to rise, but Lorraine waves her off with a gracious smile.

LORRAINE

No, no, you sit. Relax. You've been working so hard.

Lorraine moves to pour herself a cup, then returns to sit across from Claire.

LORRAINE

You've certainly made yourself comfortable here.

CLAIRE

It's hard not to, with someone as welcoming as you.

LORRAINE

And how is the baby? You certainly wear maternity well.

CLAIRE

Everything's fine. I've caught up on the letters, scheduled your Chicago appointment, and organized the rest of your week.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LORRAINE

Ever the model of efficiency. But how are you, Claire? If there's anything you need, anything at all, you must let me know.

CLAIRE

That's very kind of you, but everything's under control. I'm looking forward to reclaiming my life soon.

LORRAINE

"Reclaiming"? That's an interesting choice of words.

CLAIRE

I think there's been a misunderstanding.

LORRAINE

Oh, I don't think so. We both know what's happening here.

CLAIRE

I'm afraid I don't follow. Bryce and I have been working together, nothing more.

LORRAINE

I never mentioned Bryce.

Claire unwavering.

CLAIRE

Then you've misread something.

LORRAINE

Claire. I've read things very clearly. Thiago has been most informative. And while Bryce has shared many things, I suspect the truth isn't one of them.

CLAIRE

You're mistaken. I care deeply for both you and Bryce. Whatever you think is happening...isn't.

LORRAINE

Do you take me for a fool? Your charm, your little games...all carefully orchestrated.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

Bryce and I are nothing. I'm here to help.

LORRAINE

Help? And what of the child? Isn't it every woman's dream to become a mother?

Claire places a hand on her belly, her touch more calculated than tender.

CLAIRE

Dreams come in many forms. Not everyone wants what you have—your house, your husband, your perfect life. Except no children, right?

LORRAINE

I didn't realize you felt that way. I thought you were happy here, working with Bryce, being part of our lives.

CLAIRE

Oh, I'm sure you did. (pauses) But this? (gestures to her belly) This wasn't part of my plan. It's just...an inconvenience.

LORRAINE

An inconvenience?

CLAIRE

This child won't trap me. Once it's over, I'll finally be free to focus on what matters.

LORRAINE

And what would that be?

CLAIRE

More.

She leans forward, tilting her head slightly.

CLAIRE

Do you like my pearls? Bryce gave them to me today.

Lorraine's eyes flick to the strand of black pearls around Claire's neck.

LORRAINE

They're lovely. Quite stunning on you. Bryce has impeccable taste.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CLAIRE

He does, doesn't he?

Claire's gaze moves to the box Lorraine brought in.

CLAIRE

What's in the box?

LORRAINE

Oh, a dress. Caroline insisted I pick it up for tonight. Bryce thought I needed something new.

CLAIRE

May I see it?

LORRAINE

Of course.

Lorraine opens the box to reveal a black cocktail dress, simple yet elegant, perfectly suited to her timeless style.

CLAIRE

Beautiful.

LORRAINE

Caroline has such an eye for these things.

Claire reaches out to touch the fabric, then draws her hand back.

LORRAINE

We should get back to work. There's much to do.

POV: Car pulls up and Caroline gets out. We see her motion to the driver "one minute." Caroline bursts into the room, her energy filling the space like a hurricane. She carries an air of drama, her hands animated as she launches into her speech.

CAROLINE

...and I told her, "Flats simply won't do. You need black pumps—heels that command attention!" But does anyone ever listen to me?

Claire and Lorraine exchange amused glances as Caroline continues, her voice swelling with conviction.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CAROLINE

Fashion, my darlings, is more than fabric and thread. It's our armor, our mask, our weapon. A dress isn't just a garment—it's a declaration. The right heels can conquer a room, the perfect gown can bring a man to his knees, and a single diamond can silence a rival.

Caroline begins to pace, her voice rising, her gestures grand and theatrical.

CAROLINE

People see me as a frivolous socialite, fluttering from one boutique to the next. But they don't understand—the closet is my battlefield, and every piece is a calculated move. A tilt of the hat, a flash of silk, the glint of a brooch—it's all strategy.

She leans in, her voice lowering to a dramatic whisper.

CAROLINE

Men wage their wars with bullets and bombs, but we? We wield satin and sequins, and we win. Fashion isn't just about looking good—it's about survival, control, and power. Never underestimate a woman who knows the strength of her wardrobe. She's more dangerous than any man with a gun.

Caroline pauses, savoring her words. Lorraine and Claire sit in stunned silence. Finally, Caroline picks up Claire's teacup and takes a delicate sip.

CAROLINE

I was parched. And let's not forget the shoes. The wrong shoe ruins everything—it's like ending a symphony with a sour note. But the right heel? It transforms mere clothing into a proclamation. A sharp stiletto, clicking across marble floors, announces your presence before you even speak. It's the exclamation point on a perfectly crafted sentence.

LORRAINE

Caroline, you're unstoppable!

CLAIRE

Bravo, Mrs. Waters.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Lorraine picks up her journal, scribbling a note.

CAROLINE

Lolly, are you writing down my
brilliance again?

LORRAINE

Shh. I'm capturing this gem: "A pair of
killer heels can elevate an outfit from
mere clothing to a declaration."

CLAIRE

And I loved, "A dress isn't just a
garment—it's a declaration."

CAROLINE

Lolly, what's your shoe size?

LORRAINE

Nine.

CLAIRE

Mine too.

CAROLINE

Well, we must go. Shopping awaits!
Remember, darling, fashion isn't
frivolity—it's strategy. Every purchase
is a step toward the image we create,
the influence we command. Appearances
are everything, and the savvy woman
knows how to wield them.

She looks out at the winding mountain road with a dramatic
sigh.

CAROLINE

And this road to your place, Lolly! All
those curves and cliffs—it's
treacherous. How do you manage it?

LORRAINE

Caroline, you're exhausting.

CAROLINE

I know, but you love me for it. Come
along!

They bustle out the door, Caroline's voice trailing as they
head to the car.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

LORRAINE

Claire, I'll be back in two hours. I'm glad we had our little chat earlier—cleared the air.

Claire watches the women get into the car, their laughter carrying on the breeze. She stands at the window, her expression a mixture of amusement and resolve as she watches them drive off.

INT. STUDY - LATER

Claire picks up the new dress from the box, holding it against herself in the mirror. She tilts her head, her voice lilting with an aristocratic air as she practices.

CLAIRE

Oh yes, charmed. This? My husband bought me these pearls just today. The dress? Well, darling Mitzi, of course it's couture. Paris, naturally. Only the finest for me.

She sees her reflection glowing with imagined grandeur. The storm outside begins to rumble.

She turns back to the mirror.

CLAIRE

(smirking to herself)
I become you.

INT. MOUNTAIN HOUSE - STUDY - 2PM

Claire stands by the mirror, now wearing the dress. She turns and lets out a soft laugh, twirling as though she's already the mistress of the house.

From the shadows, Thiago watches. Finally, he steps forward, his voice sharp and colorless, cutting through the moment.

THIAGO

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

CLAIRE

Oh, Thiago, nothing better to do with your time?

THIAGO

This style doesn't suit you. You're more... Bargain Basement. Take it off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

A little fantasy never hurt anyone.

THIAGO

Fantasy? That's one word for it.
Wouldn't want you to soil the fabric
with those... sticky little fingers of
yours.

CLAIRE

Always the poet, Thiago. If only you
used those words wisely, maybe you'd be
more than just the butler.

THIAGO

And the pearls? Did you "borrow" those
again?

CLAIRE

No. A gift.

THIAGO

A gift? Aren't you resourceful.

CLAIRE

Why are you here, Thiago?

THIAGO

None of your concern. I'm running an
errand for Mr. Walters.

CLAIRE

Oh? I didn't see a car.

THIAGO

You don't see everything. I have my
motorcycle.

CLAIRE

You, on a motorcycle? Now that's a
sight I'd pay to see.

THIAGO

And you, Claire, should stick to your
work. Why Mrs. Walters keeps you
around, I'll never understand.

CLAIRE

Perhaps "understanding" is a skill
you've yet to master.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

THIAGO

(smiling coldly)

Perhaps. But I'll be watching you,
Claire. Always. Now take that dress
off, Cinderella.

Thiago lingers for a moment, his gaze lingering on her with cold calculation. Then, without another word, he strides out.

EXT. MOUNTAIN HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Claire moves to the window, watching as Thiago mounts his motorcycle. The engine roars to life, and he drives off, the sound fading into the distance.

INT. MOUNTAIN HOUSE - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Claire turns back to the mirror. She twirls, laughing softly to herself.

CLAIRE

Oh, Mitzi, isn't the life of the rich
and famous simply divine?

She sways to an invisible tune, her movements deliberate and hypnotic, as if rehearsing for an audience that isn't there.

The room grows still, the tension lingering like a ghost.

INT. MOUNTAIN HOME - STUDY - 3 PM

The study is quiet. Claire, now back in her former clothes, sits at the desk, sorting papers, her movements measured but purposeful. She hears muffled voices outside. Moving to the window, she sees Lorraine and Caroline talking by the car.

Claire is poised, her subtle maneuvers cloaked in politeness, while she plots her ultimate victory. Trying on the shoes is a symbolic transformation, stepping into Lorraine's life, if only briefly.

LORRAINE

(from outside)

I'll see you at the hotel at 7. Thanks
again for the shoes!

Caroline waves as she drives off. Lorraine enters, carrying a small bag and box.

LORRAINE

I'm back.

Claire, composed, turns to greet her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

Mr. Waters called. He needs you to stop by his office before heading home to sign some papers.

Thunder rumbles outside as rain begins to fall steadily.

LORRAINE

(sighing)

It's not the best time. I still need to get ready for tonight.

CLAIRE

Why don't I bring your dress and shoes to the house? I'll help you get ready—hair, makeup, the works.

LORRAINE

Oh, Claire, I couldn't possibly ask that of you.

CLAIRE

It'd be my pleasure.

LORRAINE

Well, if you're sure. That'll be lovely—a "girls' night."

Claire's eyes flick to the box in Lorraine's hands.

CLAIRE

Are those the shoes?

LORRAINE

Oh, yes.

She sets the box on the desk and opens it. The camera lingers on Claire's expression—rapt, as though she's gazing at the ruby slippers.

CLAIRE

Killer heels.

LORRAINE

Caroline insisted I get them. Black tie, after all.

CLAIRE

May I try them on?

LORRAINE

(chuckling)

Why not?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Lorraine takes the shoes and slips them on Claire. Her fingers rest perhaps a little too long on Claire's ankles. Lorraine gives a slight smile.

POV: CLAIRE'S FEET AS SHE STRIDES.

Claire slips on the shoes, her posture transforming. She takes a few slow steps, then glides across the room. Her confidence radiates.

LORRAINE

They look marvelous.

CLAIRE

They feel delicious.

Thunder cracks, and the lights flicker briefly before stabilizing. Neither woman reacts.

LORRAINE

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

CLAIRE

I can do that for you. Perfect French twists are my specialty.

LORRAINE

You're a gem, Claire.

Lorraine glances out the window at the worsening weather.

LORRAINE

I'd better go.

CLAIRE

Will you be all right driving down?

LORRAINE

I know this road in my sleep. Good brakes, good wipers, and intuition—that's all you need.

She pauses, turning back to Claire.

LORRAINE

I don't like ambiguity, Claire. I value clarity. Thank you again for earlier.

She places a gentle hand on Claire's arm, a gesture of camaraderie, then heads out.

EXT. MOUNTAIN HOME - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Claire stands at the window, watching Lorraine get into the car. Rain streams down the glass, blurring the view as the car pulls away.

Through the trees, Claire follows the car's descent down the winding road. A loud crash echoes, followed by an explosion.

Claire's hand rises to her chest, fingers brushing the pearls around her neck.

CLAIRE

Treacherous roads. Who could survive that?

INT. MOUNTAIN HOUSE - STUDY - 6 PM

Claire, now dressed again in the sleek black cocktail dress and heels Lorraine purchased, adjusts her French twist. She fastens the black pearls around her neck with deliberate precision. The phone rings, cutting through the silence.

Claire lets it ring three times before calmly picking it up.

CLAIRE

The Walters' residence, this is Claire.

SPLIT SCREEN: BRYCE AT THE ESTATE

Bryce paces, his voice strained with panic.

BRYCE

Claire! Have you seen Lolly? She should've been here by now. Where is she?

CLAIRE

She didn't call you?

BRYCE

No! What's going on?

CLAIRE

She mentioned driving upstate for a meeting with her agent. Something about her new novel.

BRYCE

What? She didn't tell me that. I can't believe she wouldn't mention this?

Claire opens a compact, applying red lipstick as she speaks, her tone calm and composed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

I'm surprised, too. She said it was important.

BRYCE

(sighs)

I have a dinner tonight—a black-tie event. I hate going alone.

CLAIRE

How can I help?

BRYCE

No... I couldn't ask that.

CLAIRE

Anything, Bryce. What do you need?

BRYCE

(beat)

Would you go with me? You'd need to be dressed... it's formal.

CLAIRE

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

Bryce exhales in relief.

BRYCE

I'll call ahead. Give them your name. Thank you, Claire.

CLAIRE

(smiling)

Don't worry, Bryce. Everything will be perfect.

Satisfied, she grabs her clutch, turns off the lights, and walks out.

INT. GRAND HOTEL - CITY FUNDRAISER FOR THE ARTS - NIGHT

A grand ballroom, bustling with elegant guests dressed to the nines. Jazz music fills the air, champagne flows freely, and servers glide through the room with trays of hors d'oeuvres.

Bryce stands near the center of the room with Caroline and Ashford, his gaze fixed on the main entrance. He nods and murmurs responses, but his focus is elsewhere.

CAROLINE

Bryce, are you even listening?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASHFORD

He's crumbling already. Bryce, what are you looking at?

Bryce doesn't answer. The camera shifts to the main entrance, where Claire walks in. She's radiant, wearing the black dress, killer heels, and Bryce's pearls. Heads turn. The room seems to hush for a moment as she glides through, owning the space.

Bryce is transfixed. Caroline follows his gaze.

CAROLINE

What in heaven's name?

Claire hugs each of them dramatically, planting a lipstick-red kiss on Caroline's cheek.

CLAIRE

Oh, my dear friends! Caroline, Ash, Bryce—how wonderful to see you all.

She slips her arm through Bryce's, her confidence radiating. Caroline glares at her shoes.

CLAIRE

Aren't they just divine, Caroline? These heels fit like a glove.

ASHFORD

Am I missing something?

Caroline silences him with a sharp gesture.

CAROLINE

Miss Bennett, that dress... those shoes. What is this?

BRYCE

Lolly had a meeting, so I asked Claire to join me.

Claire turns her gaze to Caroline.

CLAIRE

And with Lolly out of the way, why let this gorgeous dress and these heels go to waste?

CAROLINE

(ice-cold)
Out of the way? What does that mean, Miss Bennett?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Claire places a gentle hand on Caroline's cheek, feigning sweetness.

CLAIRE

Oh, darling, let's drop the formalities—call me Claire.

CAROLINE

We are not friends, Miss Bennett.

CLAIRE

Your loss. But let's enjoy the evening, shall we?

The tension is palpable as the crowd buzzes around them. Suddenly, TWO POLICE OFFICERS enter, scanning the room. A waiter passes with champagne, and Claire takes a glass, sipping coolly.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT, a seasoned lawman in his late 40s, is the embodiment of quiet persistence and razor-sharp instincts. With a demeanor reminiscent of a classic film noir detective, he exudes an unassuming charm that masks his dogged determination to uncover the truth. Gilbert is methodical and observant, often allowing others to underestimate him while he pieces together the puzzle.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Mr. Bryce Walters?

The room begins to quiet.

BRYCE

(offering his hand)

I'm Bryce Walters. What's going on?

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

I need you to come with me, sir.

CLAIRE

Oh, the party's just begun.

CAROLINE

Hush, Miss Bennett.

BRYCE

Is Lolly all right?

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY, a fresh-faced and eager 23-year-old, is the rookie partner to the seasoned Officer Bill Gilbert. With an enthusiasm that sometimes borders on overzealous, Sweeney is determined to prove himself in a world where experience and intuition reign supreme.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

He has a natural curiosity and a habit of speaking before thinking, often providing unintended comic relief during tense situations. Though inexperienced, his sharp intellect and keen eye for detail show great promise, even if his youthful energy occasionally clashes with Gilbert's steady, methodical approach.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

(blurting)

The dame's dead.

The room falls silent. Caroline gasps, clutching Ashford's arm.

BRYCE

Dead?

ASHFORD

My God!

CAROLINE

No!

Caroline faints, collapsing into the arms of a nearby waiter. The crowd murmurs, the tension spreading like wildfire.

Claire sips her champagne, watching the chaos with detached amusement.

CLAIRE

Such drama. Feels like a movie.

The police escort Bryce and Ashford out. The crowd swirls, whispers turning into an uproar. Caroline staggers out.

Unbothered, Claire sets her empty glass on a passing tray. Her gaze lands on a striking, James Bond-esque man across the room. She approaches him, exuding charm.

CLAIRE

Well, isn't this my lucky night? Left without a partner, only to find a handsome devil like you. Care to dance?

They move onto the dance floor as the music swells. The camera lingers on Claire's radiant, self-assured expression, then fades out.

INT: THE COUNTY MORGUE

At the morgue Bryce, Ashford, Officer Bill Gilbert and Officer Paul Sweeney. The pathologist pulls out the slab and pulls back the cover. The camera comes around to show a burnt body, unrecognizable Bryce reacts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE

Oh my lovely, what happened to you?

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Burnt up.

BRYCE

Oh my God. These are her pearls and her ring that's my Lolly's ring.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

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 PAUL SWEENEY

I mean she really/

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

That will be enough.

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.

Newspaper headlines swirl:

- 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: WALTERS ESTATE - POST FUNERAL

Bryce takes off his jacket and tie. Thiago enters. The mood is somber.

THIAGO

Sir? Sir? Mr. Walters.

BRYCE

Yes? Yes? Sorry my head is pounding.

THIAGO

Do you want/

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

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. 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

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.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

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.

BRYCE

It just seems so soon.

CLAIRE

Fasten your seatbelts, darlings,
because things are going to change
around here. 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. I could use Claire's help
to sort things out here.

Thiago pauses and gives a cold sinister look.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

THIAGO

Miss Bennett, you may have everyone else fooled, but not me. 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.

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. Unlike you, I'm not here to play by the old rules or win your favor.

THIAGO

As you wish Miss Bennett.

Thiago turns to leave.

THIAGO

Oh, Miss Bennett.

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. 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

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. 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.

BRYCE

Handle it?

The storm outside rages. Thunder cracks and rain pelts the windows. Claire, now 7 months pregnant, is seated in the study, sipping a glass of water. The atmosphere is tense.

Thiago enters, followed by Officer Bill Gilbert and Officer Paul Sweeney.

THIAGO

Miss Bennett, you have visitors.

CLAIRE

(doesn't look up)
No visitors now, Thiago.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Sorry to intrude, Miss Bennett, but this won't wait.

Claire glances up, her expression calm but calculating.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

CLAIRE

Mr. Walters has had a rough day. Surely this can wait until morning?

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Seems we may have a murder on our hands.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

(quickly)

Hush now. I'll take it from here.

Bryce looking worn.

BRYCE

What's this about a murder?

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Mr. Walters, your wife's death wasn't an accident. Her brakes were cut. Clean.

The room falls into silence, save for the storm outside.

BRYCE

My God.

CLAIRE

How dramatic. Are you sure?

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Quite sure.

He takes out a cigarette, lighting it with deliberate slowness. Smoke curls in the air as he leans forward.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Question is, who wanted her gone? And why?

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Snip, snip, just like that. Then—boom!

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Paul! Enough.

CLAIRE

How very cinematic. Are you sure you're not auditioning for a role? This is Hollywood, after all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Miss Bennett, you saw Mrs. Walters last. Care to explain why she lied about her whereabouts?

CLAIRE

Lied? Lorraine said she had a meeting with her agent. Surely you checked?

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

We did. Her agent had no idea about any meeting.

CLAIRE

Well, I suppose you'll have to ask Lorraine. Oh, wait... you can't. Perhaps she was meeting someone. Like a substitute? Maybe she had some man on the side?

Claire leans back in her chair, exuding nonchalance. Thiago, and Bryce exchange a glance.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

(leaning forward)

Where were you when she died?

CLAIRE

At the mountain house. Doing what I do best—working. And keeping this house from falling apart.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

(contemplative)

Your past, Miss Bennett—it's colorful, isn't it?

CLAIRE

Oh, Thiago's been gossiping again. How charming. But let's cut to the chase, shall we? You've got nothing on me.

She picks up a cigarette from the desk, lights it with practiced ease, and takes a slow drag.

CLAIRE

If you're looking for a culprit, you might start with him. The help always has secrets.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

We'll keep that in mind.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

CLAIRE

You do that. Now, unless you have something concrete, I suggest you leave. Mr. Walters needs rest.

She crosses to Bryce, placing a hand on his arm. Her voice softens, dripping with sweetness.

CLAIRE

You've been through so much, darling.

She hugs him tightly, her eyes meeting Thiago's over Bryce's shoulder.

CLAIRE

Thiago, show these gentlemen out.

THIAGO

This way, officers.

The officers follow Thiago out. At the door, Officer Paul Sweeney pauses, looking back.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

(snide)

Snip, snip.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

(annoyed)

Let's go.

The door closes. Claire watches from the window as the officers leave. Thunder rumbles as their car pulls away. Thiago remains outside, staring up at the window.

CLAIRE

(whispering to herself)

Keep watching, Thiago. You'll never catch me.

She turns back to Bryce, smoothing his tie and smiling sweetly.

CLAIRE

Now, let's talk about our future.

She walks over to Bryce and kisses him. He holds back for a moment and then they make passionate love. Bryce moves her to the window and takes Claire takes him from behind. Bryce drops his pants and rips his shirt off as he ravages Claire in anal sex. Claire opens the window and moans with delight.

EXT: IN THE DRIVEWAY CONTINUOUS

POV: 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. Thiago's face grows fierce and cold.

INT: THE STUDY AT THE WINDOW CONTINUOUS

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.

Outside thunder claps and rain comes down.

EXT: SMASH CUT - IN THE DRIVEWAY

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.

NT. MOUNTAIN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - 1 MONTH LATER

The sunlight streams through the open windows, the breeze ruffling the curtains. Claire, visibly pregnant, sits composed on a chaise, sipping tea. Bryce stands by the fireplace, uneasy.

The sound of a car pulling up and the crunch of gravel interrupts the peace.

CLAIRE

Who is it now?

A knock echoes through the house.

BRYCE

I'll handle this.

He exits. The muffled voices of Officer Bill Gilbert and Officer Paul Sweeney drift in, growing louder as they follow Bryce into the room.

Claire is leafing through a magazine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Sorry to intrude, but we've got some loose ends to tie up.

CLAIRE

Loose ends? My, how thorough. Please, make yourselves at home.

The officers exchange a glance, Gilbert lighting a cigarette as Sweeney pulls out his notepad. Bryce shifts uneasily.

BRYCE

Gentlemen, my fiancée is in a delicate state. Perhaps this can wait?

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Delicate, sure. But murder doesn't wait, Mr. Walters.

CLAIRE

Murder? What are you implying?

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Just doing our job, Miss Bennett. Mrs. Walters' brakes didn't fail on their own. Someone wanted her dead.

Claire places her teacup down deliberately, her calm exterior barely holding.

CLAIRE

And you're here because...?

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Because you were the last to see her alive. Care to explain the sudden change in her plans that day?

CLAIRE

Haven't we been over this already? She mentioned a meeting with her agent. I didn't question it. Why would I?

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Because her agent never heard a word about it.

CLAIRE

Perhaps Lorraine didn't feel the need to inform everyone of her every move. She was... private like that. And I don't make it a habit of lying.

Sweeney scribbles something down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

(to Sweeney)

What now? Another gem for your little notebook?

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Just making connections, Miss Bennett. You'd be amazed how a few scribbles can solve a mystery.

CLAIRE

Oh, I'm sure. Tell me, do your crayons come in different colors, or is it just the one?

Bryce stifles a laugh, but Gilbert remains unamused.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Let's stay focused. Miss Bennett, you seem awfully calm for someone in your position.

CLAIRE

And what position would that be?

Gilbert steps closer, the air growing heavy.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

The one where the walls start closing in.

Claire stands abruptly, smoothing her dress, her composure tightening like a noose.

CLAIRE

If you have something to say, Officer, say it. Otherwise, get out of my home.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Your home? That's interesting.

Claire freezes, the weight of his words sinking in.

BRYCE

This is ridiculous. Officers, we've answered your questions. Now, unless you have evidence—

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Oh, we'll be back with evidence. Don't you worry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

(leaning in)

Snip, snip.

Claire's eyes flash, her mask cracking for just a moment before she regains control.

CLAIRE

Be careful with your insinuations,
Officer. They might just come back to
bite you.

Gilbert puts out his cigarette, the tension thick as the officers exchange glances.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

We'll see ourselves out—for now.

They turn to leave. At the door, Sweeney pauses, glancing back.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Motive's a funny thing, Miss Bennett.
It's always hiding right in plain
sight.

CLAIRE

You all need to go.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Miss Bennett. One question?

CLAIRE

Oh Bryce, call the doctor!

Claire goes into labor. The scene goes to a madcap rush to get Claire to the hospital.

INT: MATERNITY WAITING ROOM AT THE HOSPITAL

Bryce is outside the delivery room pacing. Thiago, Caroline and Ashford join. The Officer Bill Gilbert and Officer Paul Sweeney are there. All of them talking, low voices heard. Then Claire's voice is heard screaming.

INT: COUNTY HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM

OFF CAMERA Claire's screaming is heard. Reactions of those gathered is bland and unfeeling sarcasm.

CLAIRE

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A slap is heard and then sound of a baby crying. A nurse bursts into the waiting room and exclaims:

NURSE

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

The ensuing dialog is razor quick and sarcastic, full of disdain for Claire.

THIAGO

Good.

CAROLINE

Who got slapped?

THIAGO

Probably not her.

CAROLINE

The harder the better.

ASHFORD

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

CAROLINE

I wish her labor had gone on for days.

THIAGO

Weeks.

BRYCE

Ok, Ok. Enough.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

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

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

I knew it! I knew it!

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

What tipped you off.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Hen pecked.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

I seen it in my brother, Billy when he got married to Veronica. You know "Billy" used to be a man of 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.

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. Now can't even muster a shadow of his former self around her. Veronica.

I see the same, sad, whipped puppy eyes in Mr. Walters.

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 PAUL SWEENEY

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

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

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

BRYCE

No!

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Lost himself in her shadow, I say.

BRYCE

No!

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Reduced to a shell of a man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BRYCE

Dammit, man, would you shut up.

Officer Paul Sweeney takes out his pad and writes as he speaks out.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

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.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

I never knew you had a brother.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

I don't.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Then what was that all about?

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

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.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Whipped Pup. Little lamb.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Slink around.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

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

OFFICERS

VERONICA!

The two walk out. They laugh as they exit repeating lines from the VERONICA story.

INT: INSIDE THE HOSPITAL ROOM.

Bryce, Caroline, 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?

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. 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. Birthing is exhausting.

CAROLINE

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAROLINE coos and kisses and talks baby talk to Cash.

CLAIRE

Leave I must take my nap.
Cash. I like that name. Very
expensive.

They all exit, Claire picks up a copy of LIFE magazine.

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)

Claire is talking to COOK, a modest woman in her 60's, and Thiago is there. Claire is arranging flowers while she speaks.

CLAIRE

Listen closely, Cook, because I won't repeat myself. This menu—this sad, uninspired collection of dishes you've proposed—it's simply not going to do. My guests, the crème de la crème of the Hollywood 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.

Bryce has entered along with Officer Bill Gilbert and Officer Paul Sweeney. They observe. Claire does not know they are there and witnessing this scene.

CLAIRE

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, is considered a symbol of culinary elegance and sophistication. I suggest you go back to the drawing board, quickly.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

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 turns with disdain.

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.

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, you are certainly not a lady and not the lady of this house.

Officer Bill Gilbert and Officer Paul Sweeney enter now break into the scene.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

OK put the cuffs on her.

Officer Paul Sweeney goes to put the cuffs on and Claire slaps him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BRYCE

Claire calm down.

THIAGO

Bargain basement trash.

CLAIRE

You shut up, manservant.

EVE, a fair, innocent girl of 23.

Eve is holding the baby. The baby starts to cry. Claire spins around in a rage.

CLAIRE

Shut that thing up. God I detest little people.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

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

Officer Paul Sweeney cuffs Claire. She swings at him and he ducks. He gets the cuffs on her.

CLAIRE

Me? Now Cook, make that Crab thing and I do want Baked Alaska.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Miss Bennett, you have the right to remain silent

CLAIRE

And we need some appetizer with significance.

THIAGO

Perhaps, "pigs in a blanket?"

CLAIRE

Thiago you are just a manservant. SHUT UP!

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

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

Claire is quickly unraveling.

CLAIRE

Oh my God, Officer! You are still talking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

You have the right to an attorney

CLAIRE

An attorney? Are you serious attorneys surround me! 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 BILL GILBERT

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

Claire spins back around to face Officer Bill Gilbert.

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 BILL GILBERT

So you understand?

CLAIRE

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

Officer Paul Sweeney flips back through his notepad and reads verbatim out loud and matter-of-factly:

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

"I do wish I could say the same but I don't make it a habit of lying." You, Miss Bennett are a liar.

CLAIRE

Liar? Oh you will be a crossing guard by tomorrow. Bryce do something!

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Show Miss Bennett the pictures.

The camera shows the pictures as Officer Paul Sweeney pulls out pictures of Claire cutting the brake lines.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Claire is in the party dress that Lorraine bought. The camera shows the pictures.

CLAIRE

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

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

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 PAUL SWEENEY

Like I said, Miss Bennett, you are a liar.

Claire kicks Officer Paul Sweeney.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Yep. Veronica, 100%

CLAIRE

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

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 BILL GILBERT

Thiago, bring her in.

Thiago leaves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

CLAIRE

Oh are we playing party games? Can't wait for this one. 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 Lorraine, Caroline and, Ashford. Silence in the room. You can see Claire's head spinning. The servants gasp and cry. Bryce is in shock.

BRYCE

Lorraine, my God, You are alive!

CLAIRE

Lolly what are you doing here?

LORRAINE

Claire is delusional/

CLAIRE

What, wait, no, tell him, Lolly. Tell him Lolly. Tell Bryce.

ON SCREEN: LORRAINE'S VERSION

As Lorraine speaks in a voice over we see the actions on the screen.

LORRAINE

(V.O)

Claire is delusional. She was obsessed. I knew she was a girl from nowhere. I saw the way she fancied Bryce. Thiago knew. He always knew she was trouble. He warned me. The day of the murder I went to leave to go see Ashford as Claire said he wanted to see me. Thiago was in garage. He said, "Shh, Claire is going to kill you. I have a plan. He had a woman, Julie Nally, this is Hollywood, she is a stunt double. She drove the car, then jumped out before the crash. I hid in the garage.

INT: THE STUDY AT THE WALTERS ESTATE
CONTINUOUS

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

I love Julie Nally, know her for
years. She and Veronica are best
friends.

Claire kicks Officer Sweeney. He dodges the kick.

CLAIRE

Lolly, no! How could you? You said you
love me. You gave me this locket.

SHOT: CLAIRE HAS A HEART LOCKET AROUND HER
NECK AND SHE OPENS IT TO REVEAL THEIR
INITIALS: LW + CB. LORRAINE LAUGHS.

LORRAINE

Love you? We already have one scandal
in this house with the likes of you.

THIAGO

Bargain Basement Betty.

CLAIRE

You manservant, shut up.

ON SCREEN: CLAIRE'S VERSION

As Claire speaks in a voice over we see "her side" of the
story.

CLAIRE

(V.O.)

No. No. On the day of murder Claire
came back. She said, "like I planned
it, you tell them I had to go see my
agent about a book or
something like that. I have that
Hollywood actress, Julie Nally.
She will drive the car and jump out
before the crash. Then I will lay low
for 6 months while you maneuver Bryce.
Then when he is out of the way, it will
be you, me and Cash. I love you,
Claire, you are my life."

LORRAINE

What a sad, sad story.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYCE

What about the body? I saw your ring. The pearls. The body was so badly burned I couldn't recognize you. But it was your ring.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Jane Doe. The body was a Jane Doe, from the morgue.

LORRAINE

Yes, Claire had a connection at the morgue to steal a "nobody" as part of her scheme. Thiago found out. We played along.

CLAIRE

No! Lorraine said, "I have all the connections, I will take care of the details."

ASHFORD

Wait, what about dental records for the body, would that have proved it wasn't Lorraine?

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Lorraine's dental office, Dr. Billy Wertz, had a fire a year ago and all records were lost, so there was no way to trace the victim in that crash.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

Thiago told us the entire plan so we went along with it.

BRYCE

No one told me anything.

LORRAINE

Bryce we couldn't. Claire would know if you knew so we had to let this play out, trap her in her web.

CLAIRE

Oh are we playing party games? Can't wait for this one. Bryce you better God Damned do something. I had your child. Remember his name? Cash. That means that you got to pay!

COOK

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

COOK runs to her. Hugs her and weeps.

COOK

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

CLAIRE

What is this? I cut those brakes. Just like you told me , Lolly. I saw that car go off the road. I heard/

LORRAINE

Thank God, Thiago uncovered your web of deceit and lies.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

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

CLAIRE

Lies! You pretentious pack of rich whores! All of you.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

Officer, take her away!

The officers take Claire out. Lorraine goes to Eve and picks up the baby. Little Cash smiles.

The camera now shows Eve 5 months pregnant.

Lorraine gives Eve a hug. Caroline and Ashford leave.

COOK

Mrs. Walters what would you like for dinner.

Lorraine sounding tired.

LORRAINE

Sandwiches. How about we all have sandwiches!

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

LORRAINE

Eve how are you feeling? You look wonderful. Bryce won't it be nice to have a 2nd Child in our family? Eve, let's take Cash upstairs for his nap, he has had a BIG afternoon!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

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.

LORRAINE

Right here? Eve, what do you think?

EVE

Mrs. Walters

LORRAINE

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!

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

The camera pans in from the back. Technical people, movie people are all around. There's a feeling of excitement in the air.

As the camera moves along, people are passing in front.

The set is the office of Bryce Walters.

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

-THE WRITER - Lorraine Walter

-THE DIRECTOR - Billy Wilder

-"CLAIRE" - Liz Taylor

-"LORRAINE" - Lana Turner

-"BRYCE" - Frank Sinatra

-"CAROLINE" - Shelly Winters

-"ASHFORD" - Jimmy Stewart

-"THIAGO" - Ricardo Montalban

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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
LORRAINE (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!

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 Lorraine Walters toasting a
glass of champagne. The photo is
elegant.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VOICE OVER BY TECH PERSON

Lorraine is the height of style and grace (think Jackie Kennedy). Claire looks long at the photo and then "practices" imitating Lorraine. Talking in a high style voice and acting out like she is at a top-drawer dinner party.

CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR)

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. Bryce enters.

CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR)

Oh, Mr. Walters! I was just-

VOICE OVER BY TECH PERSON

Her cheeks flush, the color betraying her embarrassment. For a moment, she feels small and exposed, like a child caught playing dress-up. Her hands fumble as she sets the folders on his desk, avoiding his gaze.

BRYCE (FRANK SINATRA)

No need to explain, Claire. I'm sorry for interrupting what was clearly a very important toast.

VOICE OVER BY TECH PERSON

His tone is light, almost teasing, but Claire hears the curiosity beneath it. She glances at him, her expression caught between mortification and defiance.

CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR)

Just... a silly memory. I used to act in high school.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

VOICE OVER BY TECH PERSON

She doesn't want Bryce to see how
deeply his presence has unsettled her.

BRYCE (FRANK SINATRA)

High school acting? You looked more
like a queen in her court.

VOICE OVER BY TECH PERSON

Bryce's words land unexpectedly. He's
not mocking her—he's watching her,
studying her with an interest that
feels disarming.

CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR)

Sometimes pretending is all we've got,
isn't it?

VOICE OVER BY TECH PERSON

She lifts her chin, testing the waters
of her confidence again.

BRYCE (FRANK SINATRA)

Pretending? You made it look real.

DIRECTOR (BILLY WILDER)

CUT! That was perfect.

BRYCE (FRANK SINATRA)

Liz, just great. Just great.

INT: OFF THE SET CONTINUOUS

Officer Gilbert and Officer Sweeney are in the wings and
they talk in hushed voices.

OFFICER BILL GILBERT

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

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

And me this close to Rat Pack Frank!

INT: BACK ON SET CONTINUOUS

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:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE (LIZ TAYLOR) & BRYCE
(FRANK SINATRA)

Veronica!

INT: OFF THE SET CONTINUOUS

Pan to Officer Bill Gilbert and Officer Paul Sweeney. The speak in a hushed tone.

OFFICER PAUL SWEENEY

They said "Veronica!"

INT: ON SET

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.

A montage of the behind the scenes production. Pan to the "Real" Lorraine" in her chair making notes on the script. Pan to the "Real" Bryce with Cash, Eve and the 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.

THE REAL LORRAINE IN HER CHAIR

The real Lorraine is in her chair on set, reading through the script taking notes. She gently let's her fingers caress a heart-shaped locket around her neck. Identical to the one Claire has. Lorraine smiles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE SHOT DISSOLVES AND THEN REIMAGES THE SAME ACTION BY CLAIRE IN PRISON, TENDERLY CARESSING THE SAME IDENTICAL LOCKET.

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, sitting on her bed. 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? Get out of jail!

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 Stewart. Oh my God I love Liz Taylor!

CLAIRE

Cool your jets Beula. Relax.

A note falls out of the magazine onto the floor. Beula quick gets up and hands it to Claire. 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 a long time. I'll always be watching. Every visitor, every letter, every whisper that echoes I'll know. You see, justice isn't just about the sentence;

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE (AND THE VOICE OF THIAGO)
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. Fondly, Thiago.

CLAIRE
Enjoy your victory while it lasts,
darling. 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