

ONCE BITTEN

Written by

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FADE IN:

THE PRESENT

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB PRACTICE TEE - DAY

RUTH BASTIAN (45), her cultured accent suggesting a British connection, addresses her ball with her driver. A GOLF PRO (early 40s), a bit of a fashion tragic, observes.

RUTH
I'm catching up with the Doc on
Ladies' Day and this time I aim to
steal her thunder.

Her Golf Pro sighs resignedly, and goes to her.

GOLF PRO
I'll show you once more.

He re-adjusts Ruth's grip on her club and steps back.

She prepares her swing, her grip returns to as before.

The Golf Pro shows his exasperation.

She drives her ball.

RUTH
Still not working. I don't know why
I'm paying you.

The Pro approaches again and, as before, adjusts her grip -- and again her new grip reverts to the old.

He's ready to throw in the towel.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL ESTATE - DAY

An exclusive estate set in a natural enclave in the Santa Monica Hills, cloistered behind heavy iron security gates.

SECURITY GATES:

A Mercedes convertible approaches from the roadway.

INT. THE MERCEDES:

Ruth, still in golf attire, picks up a remote control unit.

She aims toward the gates but they are already open - inwards.

She flops the remote back on the seat, drives through, pulls up a moment, retrieves her remote and tries again. The gates stutter into action as if to close - but remain open.

Ruth walks toward the gates, tries her remote again. Another stutter. She physically tries to close them to no avail.

She returns to her car and nearly collides with two YOUNG MORMONS (20s) riding out on bicycles. As they pass through, the gates angelically close behind them. She throws her hands in despair before driving off.

Outside another townhouse, NORBERT (60s) and his younger Thai wife SULI (40s) stop their gardening as Ruth passes. Suli picks up a little poodle dog and they stand erect as if to attention, acknowledging the arrival of royalty.

RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE:

The Mercedes pulls into the driveway.

A WORKER removes an elegant 'For Sale' sign out front of the neighboring townhouse, tosses it in back of a small pick-up.

A laid-back African-American man, ORLANDO JACKSON (70), short gray pony-tail, survivor from a more hip Motown era, chats to the Worker. They exchange courtesies and the Worker gets in the truck and starts up.

Ruth's garage door lifts up. She parks her Mercedes, exits and removes her golf gear from the trunk.

Orlando saunters up to her.

ORLANDO

'Sup my dear.

RUTH

Sweet man. But it will never be.

ORLANDO

(raises eyes to heaven,
sings a la Supremes)

'Where did our love go?'

(back to earth)

So, how's that handicap of yours?

The question hits a nerve.

ORLANDO (CONT'D)

What you need is a good coach.

Piqued by the topic, she sets down the golf buggy as the pick-up drives past toward the gates.

ORLANDO (CONT'D)

(off the pick-up)

Word has it your new neighbor is a man o' means.

Ruth takes a casual note of this.

RUTH

Naturally.

She takes an embroidered cloth from her buggy and polishes an offending mark on the Mercedes' back fender.

ORLANDO

You know, I have a bit of an issue with all these trespassers in our little plot in paradise.

RUTH

Under control. I'll elaborate at our next meeting.

Orlando checks the spot on the fender where the apparent offending mark was.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I'll be in touch, Mister Jackson.

She presses another remote.

He takes the hint and casually departs as the garage door starts to descend on him.

INT. RUTH'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

A room replete with fine furniture and fittings. Ruth, at an antique writing bureau, works on her i-Pad to the light of a small desk lamp

On the screen is a template for an Agenda of sorts for a committee meeting of 'The Bastian Foundation'.

The work has taken its toll and she leans back and stretches like a feline. She leaves her work, goes to a cabinet, pours a sherry and sinks into a winged chair.

EXT. CLIVE AND ROGER'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

CLIVE (45) and ROGER (35) in designer gym gear, exit their townhouse. Immaculate like all the properties in the estate, Number 15 is distinguished by two small topiary shrubs in the shape of a heart either side of the walkway.

RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE:

Ruth, a change of clothes resting on the passenger seat, reverses her Mercedes from the driveway and almost runs over the two men out for their morning walk.

Roger, the more effeminate of the two, carries on as if his life was in peril. Clive calms him down and addresses Ruth.

CLIVE
Those two young men on bicycles --

RUTH
Dealing with it.

Clive's look begs the question.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I'll be in touch, darling.

She drives off.

ROGER
I thought they were cute.

Roger slaps him on the ass and they set off on their jog.

SECURITY GATES:

Ruth has her remote in hand - it's not needed as the gates are already open. She drives through.

EXT. FREEWAY CAR TRAVELLING - DAY

Ruth talks (mute) on her cell phone as she drives.

INT. ASIF'S OFFICE - DAY

ASIF EMMANUEL (mid-30s) leans back on his plush leather office chair, on the phone.

He's not interested in the ear-bashing he's receiving. Taking his white handkerchief, he polishes the edge of his immaculate glass desk. His gold chain-link bracelet, one of a collection of bling that compliments his olive skin tone, clinks on the glass.

The caller's VOICE subsides. Asif replies.

ASIF

I'll have one of my workers look at it. You enjoy the rest of the day.

He hangs up abruptly on the caller's response.

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY

Ruth, i-Pad open before her, chairs a meeting of eight male BOARD MEMBERS.

RUTH

Is there a mover?

A MEMBER raises a hand. The Secretary, MARGOT KENNEWELL (late 40s) notes the Member.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Moved. Seconded?

Ruth doesn't bother to check.

RUTH (CONT'D)

All in favour.

Murmurs of consensus. Without checking the vote, Ruth moves on.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Now, AOB. I believe our Secretary has a few updates for us.

Margot stands, clears her throat. She begins in her best businesslike manner.

MARGOT

At our next Finance Committee meeting we'll finalise a strategy to secure some major commitments. We'll plan for the garden party and the art event. And of course our major event on the calendar, the Perpetual Trophy, is coming along nicely. Who knows, there might be a few surprises in store.

General nods of approval all round.

RUTH
Excellent job, Margot.

Margot glows, savoring the accolade, resumes her seat.

RUTH (CONT'D)
And while on the subject of
securing major commitments, I'll
also be addressing the issue of
volunteer collectors.

Bemused looks appear on various faces.

BOARD MEMBER #1
Traditionally our mainstay.

RUTH
(interjects)
They'll go the way of the dinosaur
if I have my way.

The Members sneak glances at one another. Some sneak a glance up at the wall behind Ruth.

Ruth consults her watch, gathers up her briefcase and i-Pad.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Gentlemen, we have lots of work
ahead. But for now, I have another
appointment. I'll leave you all to
the other formalities. Until the
Finance Committee meets.

She goes to the frosted glass double doors and pushes against them but her exit is thwarted. Hiding her embarrassment, she gently pulls the doors inward and departs.

On the wall behind her executive chair, a portrait of a distinguished man in his forties looks down over the impressive table. A brass tag on the bottom of the frame reads:

'Professor Arthur Bastian'

BOARD MEMBER#1 (O.C.)
If she has her way.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - FAIRWAY - DAY

Ladies' Day. Ruth, dressed the part, leads her buggy along the manicured fairway, accompanied by DOCTOR JEANETTE PARKER (late 40s) who carries her well-proportioned body well.

They arrive at Ruth's ball near the rough.

JEANETTE

Of course I'm in. I've already arranged my schedule. Came so close last year, so I'm thinking it must be my turn.

RUTH

No! Mine. Your ball's up ahead.

Jeanette cringes, shakes her head in disbelief.

Ruth selects an iron and approaches her ball.

JEANETTE

I mean my turn this year to have my name on the trophy. All I need is a decent partner.

Ruth plays her ball.

RUTH

Count me out.

Jeanette watches Ruth's ball slice into tree tops to the right.

JEANETTE

(relieved)
Pity about that.

Ruth shoves her iron back into the bag.

JEANETTE (CONT'D)

Have your grip looked at. What's your Pro have to say?

RUTH

I've fired the silly man. Again.

No surprises here for Jeanette.

JEANETTE

You need a real man, one who can measure up.

RUTH

Uh-uh. Once bitten.

She grabs her buggy, moves off to the right of the fairway.

Amused by it all, Jeanette moves off down the middle.

Ruth, in the rough, searches for her ball, can't find it. She looks about her. No witnesses. She takes a new ball from her bag and again looks about her.

RUTH (V.O.)

It's a matter of integrity.

INT. RUTH'S LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ruth, still in her golfing outfit, is among an eclectic ensemble, including Norbert and Suli, the gay couple Clive and Roger, and an aging HILDA (70) seated, her walker frame beside her, being addressed by Orlando.

ORLANDO

Exactly. A matter of integrity of our little patch of paradise.

Murmurs of affirmation from all.

ORLANDO (CONT'D)

Soon we'll be at the mercy of collectors and hawkers of all descriptions.

The hard-of-hearing Hilda cups a hand to her ear.

HILDA

Hookers? That was years ago. I was working my way through coll--

Norbert hushes her, placates her.

NORBERT

Hawkers dear, Hawkets.

Everyone stands stunned in disbelief as Orlando gathers his train of thought again.

ORLANDO

The problem lies, my friends, with them pearly gates.

Ruth takes control of proceedings.

RUTH

Agreed. Rest assured appropriate action has already been taken with Mister Emmanuel.

There are polite murmurs of approval for Ruth's decisiveness.

RUTH (CONT'D)

We can do without the riff-raff --

But her moment of glory is interrupted by a CACOPHONY outside, a defective vehicle exhaust system, an ailing transmission.

EXT. NEIGHBORING TOWNHOUSE - AFTERNOON

A dilapidated old removal van sits outside the vacant property next door. Two laborer types, SYD and GORDON (both late-50s), unload, dumping articles in disarray on the lawn.

A late model Mustang convertible reverses into the driveway.

MORRIE ANDERSON (55), similarly dressed, alights. With a few streaks of gray in his generous head of hair, his is a cheeky grin that serves to accentuate a few crow's feet around the otherwise handsome eyes.

He removes a classy golf bag and clubs, their heads well protected, from the rear seat well of the Mustang.

Syd unceremoniously dumps a sturdy carpenter's tool-box.

Gordon holds aloft an art deco-era chrome smoker's stand, about to suffer the same fate.

Morrie rushes to its rescue.

MORRIE

Take it easy fellas. That stand has a history.

Ruth, accompanied by Orlando, greets them.

RUTH

Gentlemen, please.

Morrie removes a small cigarillo from behind his ear and lights it, much to Ruth's chagrin.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I don't know how long you've been in the removal business but if I were the new owner--

Syd, short and dumpy, steps forward and interrupts Ruth.

SYD
That'll be Mister Anderson.

Morrie leans a bent elbow on his pal's shoulder.

RUTH
If I were Mister Anderson, I would want a little more care taken with my property. The poor man's obviously invested a lot of money --

MORRIE
Amen to that. But not to worry, my dear, we're just about finished.

RUTH
(more stern than before)
Sweet man. But I am not your 'dear'!

Syd retreats a step back from Morrie who almost loses his balance without the support. Morrie is unfazed.

MORRIE
Noted, sweetheart.

Orlando cringes. But worse. Morrie draws on his cigarillo and impudently exhales volumes of smoke.

RUTH
I shall be having a word with the new owner.

MORRIE
As you wish.

The very British Ruth comes to the fore.

RUTH
I am not impressed with your performance.

Morrie assesses her.

MORRIE
Nor any other man's, I'm guessing.

Her nose put out of joint, she reels and storms off.

Orlando raises an eyebrow and saunters off after Ruth.

A muffled WOLF-WHISTLE from Syd.

Amused, Morrie drags on his cigarillo, suppresses a cough.

He looks across to Ruth's property and waves a hand at the concerned faces of the Residents staring out the window.

INT. RUTH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ruth and Orlando enter to a silent reception from the other shell-shocked Residents who drift back from the window.

RUTH

Well if there's no other business.

The others take their cue and progressively depart.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL ESTATE - AFTERNOON

The Residents disperse. Morrie 'doffs his cap'. Some smile equivocally, others offer scant acknowledgement.

Norbert and Suli, escorting Hilda with her walker frame, pass the men. Norbert offers a polite smile, Suli censures him.

Morrie's co-workers contain their mirth as he looks back to Ruth's Townhouse.

MORRIE

Nor any other man's, I'm guessing.

INT. MORRIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Seated in a plush recliner chair, Morrie kisses a framed photograph of a young woman taken a few decades earlier.

MORRIE

Having a good time, wish you were here.

He places the photo on the adjacent art deco smokers' stand - the ashtray full of butts. He leans back, drained.

A few unopened packing cartons litter the floor. There, too is Morrie's golf bag and buggy, the head of each club comfy in its protector.