

ONCE BITTEN

First Ten Pages

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FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB PRACTICE TEE - DAY

RUTH BASTIAN (early 50s), addresses her ball with her driver.

A GOLF PRO (early 40s) observes her, sighs resignedly, intervenes, re-adjusts Ruth's grip on her club, steps back.

She prepares her swing, her grip returns to as before, she drives her ball.

She's not happy with the outcome.

The Golf Pro raises his eyes to heavens, exasperated.

Ruth stares daggers at him.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL ESTATE - SECURITY GATES - DAY (MORNING)

A Mercedes convertible approaches the heavy iron security gates of an exclusive estate, about to enter.

THE MERCEDES

Ruth, still in golf attire, picks up a remote control unit, aims toward the gates but they are already open - inwards.

She drives through, pulls up a moment, aims her remote. The gates stutter into action as if to close - but remain open.

SECURITY GATES

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

A TOWNHOUSE (1)

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

A laid-back African-American man, ORLANDO JACKSON (70), short gray pony-tail, swaggers, chats to the Worker. They exchange courtesies, the Worker gets in the truck, starts up.

TOWNHOUSE (2)

Two handsome YOUNG MORMONS scramble on their bicycles and frantically pedal off from the townhouse distinguished by two heart-shaped topiary shrubs either side of the walkway.

CLIVE (45) and ROGER (35) in designer gym gear, at the front door, the NUMBER 15 prominently displayed, head off at a jog.

SECURITY GATES

Ruth struggles with gates. The small pick-up TOOTS.

She steps back as it passes through, returns to her car, nearly collides with the two Young Mormons who speed out.

After they pass through, the gates close smoothly.

Ruth throws her hands in despair, drives off.

TOWNHOUSE (3)

NORBERT (60s) and his younger Thai wife SULI (40s) in their front garden stop their toil. Suli picks up a small corgi dog. They stand erect as Ruth's car passes.

RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE:

The Mercedes pulls into the driveway.

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

Orlando saunters up to her.

ORLANDO

A word about all these trespassers.

They are joined by Clive and the more effeminate Roger.

CLIVE

Like those two young men on bi --

Ruth raises a hand to him.

Her cultured accent suggests a British connection.

RUTH

I'm taking measures.

Placated, they set off on their jog.

ORLANDO

Those damn gates again.

RUTH

I'm taking measures, Mister
Jackson. I'll be in touch.

She presses another remote.

The garage door descends on Orlando. He takes the hint and glides away like a seasoned Motown backup.

INT. RUTH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The room is replete with fine furniture and fittings. Ruth, completes dialing her phone.

INT. ASIF'S OFFICE - DAY

ASIF EMMANUEL (mid-30s), a collection of bling to compliment his olive skin tone, leans back on his plush leather chair, holds his phone away from his ear.

He nonchalantly polishes the edge of his immaculate glass desk with a white handkerchief, his gold chain-link bracelet CLINKS on the glass.

The caller's ranting VOICE subsides. Asif replies.

ASIF

Rest assured I'll have one of my
workers take another look at them.

He hangs up abruptly on the caller's response.

RESUME RUTH'S LIVING ROOM

Ruth glares menacingly at the phone she holds.

RUTH

Not with bated breath.

INT. RUTH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY - LATER

Ruth, a change of clothes, addresses the eclectic RESIDENTS, including Norbert and Suli, the gay couple Clive and Roger, and an aging HILDA (70) seated on her walker frame.

RUTH

I have taken it upon myself to reprimand Mister Emmanuel who assures me action will be taken.

Murmurs of affirmation from all.

ORLANDO

Good, 'cos I for one don't truck with no riff-raff hawkers.

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

HILDA

Hookers? I was working my way through --

Norbert hushes her, placates her.

Everyone stands stunned in disbelief.

Ruth winces, takes control of proceedings.

RUTH

Be assured this woman won't tolerate any riff --

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

EXT. NEIGHBORING TOWNHOUSE - SAME

A dilapidated removal van comes to a halt at the curb.

Two laborer types, SYD and GORDON (60-ish), alight, dump household articles in disarray on the lawn.

A late model, dusty Mustang convertible reverses into the townhouse driveway.

MORRIE ANDERSON (62), in work gear, alights. A few streaks of gray in his generous head of hair. A cheeky grin accentuates a few crow's feet around waggish eyes.

He lifts the trunk of the Mustang, removes a classy golf bag and clubs, their heads sheathed in colorful protectors.

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's heritage listed, you know.

Ruth, accompanied by Orlando, greets them.

RUTH

Gentlemen, please.

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

RUTH

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.

The taller Morrie leans a bent elbow on Syd's shoulder.

RUTH

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

MORRIE

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

RUTH

Sweet man. I am not your dear.

Syd retreats a step back from Morrie who loses his balance without the support. He genuflects.

MORRIE

Noted, my lady.

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

Be my guest.

The very British Ruth comes to the fore.

RUTH

We are not impressed with your performance.

MORRIE

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

Nose put out of joint, Ruth reels and storms off.

Orlando grimaces, saunters off after her.

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.

E/I. RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE - SAME

Concerned faces of the Residents stare out the window.

INT. RUTH'S LIVING ROOM - SAME - CONTINUOUS

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

RUTH

If there's no other business.

The others take their cue and progressively shuffle out.

RESIDENTIAL ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

The Residents disperse from Ruth's townhouse.

Morrie doffs his cap.

Some smile equivocally, others offer scant acknowledgement.

Norbert and Suli escort Hilda with her walker frame past the men. Norbert offers a polite smile, Suli elbows his ribs.

Syd and Gordon contain their mirth.

Morrie looks back to Ruth's Townhouse.

MORRIE

Nor any other man's.

INT. MORRIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A few unopened packing cartons litter the floor. There, too is Morrie's golf bag and buggy.

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

He replaces the photo on the adjacent art deco smoker's stand, its ashtray full of butts. He leans back, drained.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL ESTATE - DAY

RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE

Ruth, in smart business outfit, exits her front door with a cup of coffee. She breathes in the morning air, surveys her little domain, sips her coffee ... almost chokes.

MORRIE'S TOWNHOUSE

Morrie in coveralls on the front lawn, bucket and sponge, suds all over his Mustang - a blot on the landscape.

He acknowledges Ruth with a courteous nod.

She hastily wipes her soiled chin and retreats inside.

NORBERT'S TOWNHOUSE

Over the way, Norbert lets his corgi dog out for a pee.

A wave from Morrie.

Norbert halfheartedly reciprocates. He is reprimanded.

SULI (O.S.)
Don't fraternize, honey.

Morrie, unfazed, continues his car wash.

INT. RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE - GARAGE - DAY - LATER

Ruth, dressed in a business suit, deposits her briefcase in the passenger seat of her Mercedes.

The garage door rises. Ruth reverses her Mercedes out the driveway. She is distracted.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

Morrie, on his lawn, whistles jovially as he gives a final polish to a now gleaming Mustang.

The Mercedes reverses erratically, a rear wheel THUDS over the curb.

Ruth draws into the curb, exits and examines the flat tire.

MORRIE (O.S.)
's'up sweetheart?

Morrie, at the rear of the Mercedes spies the problem.

MORRIE
Flat tire?

Ruth looks to the heavens.

MORRIE
Here, I'll give you a hand.

RUTH
Kind of you. But I'll have my
garage man attend to it.

Morrie raises eyebrows, impressed by her implied status.

Ruth retrieves her briefcase, takes out a cell phone.

Morrie returns to his car, gathers his gear from the lawn.

LATER

Ruth paces impatiently beside her car.

Morrie, dressed for golf, approaches with a fine china cup and saucer.

MORRIE
Orange Pekoe while we're waiting? I
always brew for two.

Ruth appraises his fine attire but otherwise snubs him.

MORRIE
Or perhaps green's more your color?

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY - SAME

On the wall, a portrait of a distinguished man in his forties looks down over the impressive table.

Four conservative middle-aged male COMMITTEE MEMBERS stand around the table, casually sip cups of coffee, chat; one subtly consults his watch.

The impressive head executive chair is vacant.

EXT. SECURITY GATES - SAME

A ROADSIDE ASSIST vehicle drives through the open gates.

The gates begin to close but stutter, stop, and remain open.

MORRIE AND RUTH

Ruth tosses her remote on to the seat of her car.

MORRIE

Someone should do something about those gates, if not the tire.

Morrie takes a sip of his tea.

The vehicle approaches and pulls up behind Ruth's Mercedes.

The male MECHANIC(30s) exits the vehicle and goes to Morrie.

MECHANIC

What seems to be the problem, pal?

Morrie nods toward the Merc and an incensed Ruth.

MORRIE

I believe she needs servicing.

Morrie makes good his escape back to his townhouse.

The mechanic surveys the vehicle and sees the tire.

MECHANIC

Ah-ha, flat tire.

Ruth cringes.

RUTH

Just fix it.

INT. BOARD ROOM - LATER

The four Committee Members are all seated, agitated, ties undone; empty cups pushed to the centre of the table.

They all consult their watches.

EXT. SECURITY GATES - SAME

A red Audi cabriolet, soft top down, pulls up at the gates.

The driver, DENISE (23), the type that turns heads, orientates herself, locates the intercom - but the gates are already open almost to about three-quarters their maximum.

She slowly navigates through.

RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE

The Mechanic finalizes the changing of Ruth's wheel. Orlando swaggers on the scene.

ORLANDO

Flat tire?

Ruth looks to the heavens. The red Audi cruises past. She and Orlando watch it pull up outside Morrie's townhouse.

Denise maneuvers her legs out of the car and sashays toward Morrie's front door.

The Mechanic ogles, issues a subtle wolf-whistle.

RUTH

(to Orlando)

Don't even think about it.

MORRIE'S TOWNHOUSE

The front door opens, Denise throws her arms around Morrie.

DENISE

First an apartment and now the car.

Morrie looks past his Mustang on the lawn to the Audi.

MORRIE

A small price to pay.

Morrie tips his imaginary cap to Ruth, escorts Denise inside.

RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE

Ruth and Orlando stand agog.

The Mechanic, arms embracing the removed wheel, draws up next to them. Lost in a fantasy, he loses grip and drops the wheel on his foot. Agony.

Ruth's looks could kill.

The Mechanic hastily gathers the spent wheel and places it in the Mercedes' trunk.