

ONCE BITTEN

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FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB PRACTICE TEE - DAY

RUTH BASTIAN (late 40s), addresses her ball with her driver.

A GOLF PRO (early 40s) observes her, sighs resignedly, and goes to her.

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. She's not happy with the outcome.

The Pro shakes his head pathetically, ready to throw in the towel.

Ruth stares daggers at him.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL ESTATE - SECURITY GATES - MORNING

A Mercedes convertible approaches the heavy iron security gates of an exclusive estate.

THE MERCEDES

Ruth, 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, survivor from a more hip Motown era, approaches, chats to the Worker. They exchange courtesies and the Worker gets in the truck, starts up.

## TOWNHOUSE (2)

CLIVE (45) and ROGER (35) in designer gym gear, at the front door of their townhouse, Number 15, distinguished by two small heart-shaped topiary shrubs either side of the walkway.

They watch as two YOUNG MORMONS, making good their escape, scramble on their bicycles and frantically pedal off.

## SECURITY GATES

Ruth struggles with gates.

The small pick-up TOOTS, Ruth steps back as it passes through. She returns to her car and nearly collides with the two Young Mormons speeding out on bicycles. As they pass through, the gates close smoothly behind them.

She throws her hands in despair before driving off.

## TOWNHOUSE (3)

As Ruth's car passes NORBERT (60s) and his younger Thai wife SULI (40s) stop gardening. Picking up a small corgi dog, they stand erect, as if acknowledging the arrival of royalty.

## RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE:

The Mercedes pulls into the driveway.

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

Orlando saunters up to her.

ORLANDO

Bin workin' on that ol' handicap?

The question hits a nerve. Ruth sets down the golf buggy.

RUTH

Apparently my grips need replacing.

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

ORLANDO

Don't know if you've noticed, but  
all these trespassers --

They are joined by Clive and the more effeminate Roger.

CLIVE

Like those two young men on bi --

Ruth placates him, her cultured accent suggesting a British connection.

RUTH

I'm taking measures, darlings.

ROGER

I thought they were cute.

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

Orlando checks the cleaned fender.

ORLANDO

Those damn gates again.

RUTH

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

She presses another remote.

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

INT. RUTH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

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

INT. ASIF'S OFFICE - DAY

ASIF EMMANUEL (mid-30s) leans back on his plush leather chair, holds his phone away from his ear, disinterested in the caller's ranting and raving.

He nonchalantly polishes the edge of his immaculate glass desk with a white handkerchief, 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

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 - AFTERNOON

Ruth addresses an eclectic ensemble, including Norbert and Suli, the gay couple Clive and Roger, and an aging HILDA (70) seated, her walker frame beside her.

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 shakes her head, takes control of proceedings.

RUTH  
Be assured this woman don't truck with no riff --

But her moment of glory is interrupted by a CACOPHONY outside, a defective vehicle exhaust, 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 (60-ish), unload, dumping articles in disarray on the lawn.

A late model, rather dirty Mustang convertible reverses into the driveway.

MORRIE ANDERSON (late 50s), similarly dressed, alights. A few streaks of gray in his generous head of hair, and a cheeky grin that serves to accentuate a few crow's feet around his waggish eyes.

From the rear seat well of the Mustang, he 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 my right hand man.

Ruth, accompanied by Orlando, greets them.

RUTH

Gentlemen, please.

Unloading curtailed, 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.

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 almost loses his balance without the support. Morrie is unfazed.

MORRIE

Noted, my good lady.

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

RUTH

I shall have 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.

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

Orlando raises an eyebrow and 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 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

If there's no other business!

The others take their cue and progressively depart.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL ESTATE - AFTERNOON

The Residents disperse from Ruth's townhouse. 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, with an elbow in the ribs.

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

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.

Seated in a plush recliner chair, Morrie 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 - the ashtray full of butts. He leans back, drained.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - EARLY MORNING - INTERCUT

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

MORRIE'S TOWNHOUSE:

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

He acknowledges Ruth with a courteous nod.

She hastily wipes her soiled top 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 but is reprimanded.

SULI (O.S.)

Don't fraternize, honey.

Morrie, unfazed, continues washing his car.

RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE - LATER

In her garage, 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 by Morrie on his lawn giving a final polish to a now gleaming Mustang.

The Mercedes reverses erratically, a rear wheel THUDS over the curb. An irregular SOUND. She draws into the curb, exits and examines the deflated tire.

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

Morrie, at the rear of the Mercedes spies the flat tire.

MORRIE (CONT'D)  
Flat tire?

She cringes.

MORRIE (CONT'D)  
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.

She leans into her car, retrieves a cell phone from her briefcase while Morrie returns to his car, gathers his gear.

EXT. RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY - LATER

Ruth paces impatiently beside her car.

Morrie, dressed for golf attire, 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 (CONT'D)  
Or perhaps green's more your color?

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY - SAME

INTERCUT

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

Four male conservative COMMITTEE MEMBERS stand around the table and casually sip cups of tea and coffee; one subtly consults his watch. The head executive chair is vacant.

SECURITY GATES

An emergency service vehicle, signage indicating it specializes in Mercedes vehicles, enters.

The gates stutter, begin to close but stop after a foot or two 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(30) exits the vehicle and goes to Morrie.

MECHANIC

What seems to be the problem, pal?

Morrie directs him 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; their empty cups pushed to the centre of the table.

They all consult their watches.

SECURITY GATES - SAME

A red Audi cabriolet, soft top down, pulls up at the gates. The driver, DENISE (23), like her car, would certainly turn heads. She orientates herself, locates the intercom but the gates are already open almost to their maximum.

She slowly navigates through.

RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE

As the Mechanic finalizes the changing of Ruth's wheel, Orlando arrives on the scene.

ORLANDO

Flat tire?

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

The Mechanic ogles as Denise maneuvers her legs out of the car and sashays toward Morrie's front door. He 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.

Acknowledging Ruth et al, Morrie escorts Denise inside.

## RUTH'S TOWNHOUSE

Ruth and Orlando are 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. She mutters to Orlando.

RUTH  
(refers to Mechanic's foot)  
Better check for brain damage.

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

## INT. RUTH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY - LATER

Ruth, sherry in hand, parades before Orlando, standing sentinel, his back to the window.

RUTH  
See what happens when the parvenu  
move in? I don't mind different  
people, discreet people.

Orlando coyly plays with his gray ponytail.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
Like our friends at number fifteen -  
professionals. But not the oldest  
profession.

DENISE (O.S.)  
I'm just a spoilt little working  
girl.

Ruth joins Orlando and they both turn to the window and the activity outside.